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Events, Opportunities

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| HEADLINE | 01/26 Wide-ranging snowfall travel problems |
| SOURCE | https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2023/01/26/winter-storms-US-Northeast-Midwest-snow/6311674737883/ |

GIST

Less than a week after a deadly winter storm brought heavy snowfall to the interior Northeast, the region was once again blanketed in precipitation, along with over a foot of snow in the Ozark Mountains and more snow across the Midwest.

The snowfall created many travel troubles for vehicles and airplanes alike, as well as massive power outages for several states.

In the Midwest, multiple accidents shut down traffic Wednesday, including one accident on Interstate 475 west of Toledo, Ohio. At least one semi-trailer truck was seen off the road via a traffic camera, but it was unclear if there were any injuries.

At the Ohio-Michigan state line, southbound Interstate 75 was mostly blocked in Lucas County, Ohio, [after a semi jackknifed](#). More than 1,000 crews were on duty Wednesday [to clear roads](#) as snow moved through the northern portion of the state, according to the Ohio Department of Transportation.

The rampant severe weather led to numerous flight delays and cancellations at major airports. At LaGuardia Airport in New York City, severe weather and wind caused some [arriving flight delays](#) during the afternoon hours, averaging 42 minutes. At Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, [a ground stop was put into effect](#) in the early afternoon due to snow on the runways.

According to FlightAware, there were [3,641 flight delays within, into or out of the United States on Wednesday afternoon](#), including 648 at Chicago O'Hare International and 290 at the Detroit airport. Chicago Midway International Airport led the way in cancellations, with a total of 136 through the afternoon hours.

Farther south, snow was heavy in parts of northern Arkansas and southern Missouri, where the Ozark Mountains aided in enhancing snowfall totals. According to PowerOutage.us, more than 150,000 electric customers were without power in the two states Wednesday morning, including over 97 of all customers out in Missouri's Oregon and Howell counties.

The highest reported snowfall total between Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons in the Ozark region was in Logan, Ark., in Benton County, the home of retailer Walmart. Logan took in 16 inches of snow over the 24-hour period, with the second-highest total being 14.5 inches reported in Searcy, Ark.

Other top snowfall totals across the Ozark region were in Newton, Ark. (13.2 inches), Marion, Ark. (12 inches), and Howell, Mo. (12 inches).

In the Northeast on Wednesday, top snowfall totals were reported in West Virginia in the cities of Keyser (6.5 inches) and Hartmansville (6.3 inches). Other states that received snow included Maryland, with 5.8 inches accumulated in La Vale, and Pennsylvania, with 4.8 inches received in Hollidaysburg.

One place in the Northeast that was [desperate for measurable snowfall](#) was New York City, but the hub only received a trace of snow at the National Weather Service's climate site at Central Park. A quick changeover into rain after the short round of snowflakes meant that the Big Apple is still in jeopardy of the latest first measurable snowfall on record, set before on Jan. 29, 1973.

The streak of consecutive days without measurable snow in New York City is now at 322 days, the second-longest streak on record behind a 332-day streak that ended on Dec. 15, 2020.

Farther west in New York, thundersnow was observed near Tonawanda, located about 10 miles north-northwest of Buffalo around 2:20 p.m. EST Wednesday. Thundersnow was also reported in southern Ontario, about 30 miles east of Detroit.

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HEADLINE 01/26 IAEA: Iran can 'fuel' nuclear weapons

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| SOURCE | https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-iran-politics-government-mahmoud-ahmadinejad-6acdb64d36fcbe05b3ee725d8a585d96?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_07 |
| GIST | <p>DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran has enough highly enriched uranium to build “several” nuclear weapons if it chooses, the United Nations’ top nuclear official is now warning. But diplomatic efforts aimed at again limiting its atomic program seem more unlikely than ever before as Tehran arms Russia in its war on Ukraine and as unrest shakes the Islamic Republic.</p> <p>The warning from Rafael Mariano Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency, in response to questions from European lawmakers this week, shows just how high the stakes have become over Iran’s nuclear program. Even at the height of previous tensions between the West and Iran under hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad before the 2015 nuclear deal, Iran never enriched uranium as high as it does now.</p> <p>For months, nonproliferation experts have suggested Iran had enough uranium enriched up to 60% to build at least one nuclear weapon — though Tehran long has insisted its program is for peaceful purposes. While offering a caveat on Tuesday that “we need to be extremely careful” in describing Iran’s program, Grossi bluntly acknowledged just how large Tehran’s high-enriched uranium stockpile had grown.</p> <p>“One thing is true: They have amassed enough nuclear material for several nuclear weapons, not one at this point,” Grossi said.</p> <p>The Argentine diplomat then referred to Benjamin Netanyahu’s famous 2012 speech to the United Nations, in which the Israeli prime minister held up a placard of a cartoon-style bomb with a burning wick and drew a red line on it to urge the world to not allow Tehran’s program to highly enrich uranium. While the 2015 nuclear deal drastically reduced Iran’s uranium stockpile and capped its enrichment to 3.67%, Netanyahu successfully lobbied then-President Donald Trump to withdraw from the accord and set up the current tensions.</p> <p>“You remember there was to be this issue of the breakthrough and Mr. Netanyahu drawing things at the U.N. and putting lines — well, that is long past. They have 70 kilograms (155 pounds) of uranium enriched at 60%. ... The amount is there,” Grossi said. “That doesn’t mean they have a nuclear weapon. So they haven’t proliferated yet.”</p> <p>But the danger remains. Analysts point to what happened with North Korea, which had reached a 1994 deal with the U.S. to abandon its nuclear weapons program. The deal fell apart in 2002. By 2005 and wary of U.S. intentions after its invasion of Iraq, Pyongyang announced it had built nuclear weapons. Today, North Korea has ballistic missiles designed to carry nuclear warheads that are capable of reaching the U.S.</p> <p>Iran’s mission to the U.N. did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday on Grossi’s remarks and authorities in Tehran did not directly acknowledge them. However, Iranian state television quoted Mohammad Eslami, the head of the country’s civilian nuclear program, on Thursday as saying Tehran would welcome a visit by Grossi to the country.</p> <p>Iranian diplomats for years have pointed to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s preachings as a binding fatwa, or religious edict, that Iran wouldn’t seek an atomic bomb. However, Iranian officials in recent months have begun openly talking about the prospect of building nuclear weapons.</p> <p>Talks between Iran and the West ended in August with a “final text” of a roadmap on restoring the 2015 deal that Iran until today hasn’t accepted. As Iran’s rial currency plunges further to historic lows against the dollar, Iranian officials including Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian make unsupported claims about American officials agreeing to their demands or frozen money abroad being released.</p> <p>At the State Department, the denials about Iran’s claims have grown more and more pointed.</p> |

"We've heard a number of statements from the Iranian foreign minister that are dubious if not outright lies, so I would just keep that broader context in mind when you point to statements from the Iranian foreign minister," State Department spokesperson Ned Price said Monday in a response to a question.

Price and others in President Joe Biden's administration say any future talks with Iran remain off the table as Tehran cracks down on the months-long protests after the death of Mahsa Amini, a young woman detained in September by the country's morality police. At least 527 people have been killed and over 19,500 arrested amid the unrest, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran, a group monitoring the protests.

Another part of the Americans' exasperation — and increasingly of the Europeans as well — comes from [Iran arming Russia with the bomb-carrying drones that repeatedly have targeted power plants and civilian targets across Ukraine](#). It remains unclear what Tehran, which has a strained history with Moscow, expects to get for supplying Russia with arms. One Iranian lawmaker has suggested the Islamic Republic could get Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets to replace its aging fleet comprised primarily of pre-1979 American warplanes, though such a deal hasn't been confirmed.

Such fighter jets would provide a key air defense for Iran, particularly as its nuclear sites could increasingly be eyed. Israel, which has carried out strikes to halt nuclear programs in Iraq and Syria, has warned it will not allow Iran to obtain a nuclear bomb.

The U.S. and Israel also launched its largest-ever joint air, land and sea exercise this week called Juniper Oak that the Pentagon described as "not meant to be oriented around any single adversary or threat." However, it comes amid the heightened tensions with Iran and includes aerial refueling, targeting and suppressing enemy air defenses — capabilities that would be crucial in conducting airstrikes.

For now, Grossi said there was "almost no diplomatic activity" over trying to restore the Iran nuclear deal, an agreement he now describes as "an empty shell." But he still urged more diplomacy as Tehran still would need to design and test any possible nuclear weapon.

"We shouldn't give up," he said.

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| HEADLINE | 01/26 Memphis awaits police body-cam footage |
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| SOURCE | https://www.foxnews.com/us/tyre-nichols-video-police-chief-warns-memphis-violently-body-cam-footage-release |
| GIST | <p>Authorities in Tennessee are preparing for the release of police officer body cam footage of Tyre Nichols, a 29-year-old Black man who died three days after a traffic stop on Jan. 7.</p> <p>Memphis Police Chief Cerelyn Davis gave an address Wednesday evening and called Nichols' death "heinous, reckless and inhumane," cautioning people not to react violently after seeing the footage.</p> <p>"This is not just a professional failing. This is a failing of basic humanity towards another individual," Davis said, saying the five officers and others who were involved in his death "failed our community, and they failed the Nichols family. That is beyond regrettable."</p> <p>"In the vein of transparency, when the video is released in the coming days, you will see this for yourselves," she added. "I expect you to feel what the Nichols family feels. I expect you to feel outraged by the disregard for basic human rights as our police officers have taken an oath to do the opposite of what transpired on the video."</p> <p>Civil rights attorney Ben Crump also reviewed the body camera footage with Nichols' family and similarly described it as "appalling" and "heinous."</p> <p>"It is appalling. It is deplorable. It is heinous. It is violent," Crump said Monday.</p> |

[The police chief](#) also acknowledged the video's contents will likely provoke people to take action, but discouraged them from acting violently.

"I expect our citizens to exercise their First Amendment [right to protest](#), to demand action and results. But," she continued, "we need to ensure our community is safe in this process."

"None of this is a calling card for inciting violence or destruction on our community or against our citizens," Davis said.

Davis also said the investigation and release of the body cam footage are among the first steps for the police to regain its community standing, and called for "true responsible action and change."

"In our hurt and our outrage and our frustration, there is still work that needs to be done to build each other up to continue the momentum in improving our police and community relationships and partnerships," she said.

Davis added: "To show those who watch us now that this behavior is not what will define our community and this great city. This is not a reflection of the good work that many Memphis police officers do every day. What comes next is our defining moment. What we all do next can be that reflection of our character."

"I am not wavering in my commitment to you to have a police force that is here to serve and protect you," she also said. "I have met with and offered condolences to Tyre's mother and father and have asked for the support of our community leaders and our clergy in this extremely difficult moment."

She added, "It is my intent as a proactive measure that a complete and independent review on all of the Memphis Police Department's specialized units and to ensure policies, and procedures are adhered to in the daily encounters with the citizens we are sworn to serve."

In her remarks, Davis said she was not only speaking as a chief of police but "a citizen of this community that we share," "a mother" and "a caring human being who wants the best for all of us."

Nichols was pulled over on Jan. 7 around 8:30 p.m. for "reckless driving" near Raines Road and Ross Road in Memphis.

A "confrontation occurred" during the stop, which resulted in police chasing Nichols on foot, police said. He was later apprehended.

"While attempting to take the suspect into custody, another confrontation occurred; however, the suspect was ultimately apprehended," MPD said. "Afterward the suspect complained of having shortness of breath, at which point an ambulance was called to the scene."

He was transported in critical condition to St. Francis Hospital, where he died three days later.

The five Memphis police officers who were involved in the death have been identified as Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Emmitt Martin III, Desmond Mills Jr. and Justin Smith. They were subsequently fired.

Chief Davis said other MPD officers are still under investigation for "department policy violations."

Two personnel from the Memphis Fire Department have also been fired, and an internal investigation has been launched.

"Last week, two MFD personnel involved in the initial patient care of Tyre Nichols were relieved of duty while an internal investigation is being conducted," the Tennessee city's fire department told Fox News on Tuesday.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Heart-related deaths rose sharply in 2020 |
| SOURCE | https://www.cbsnews.com/news/heart-related-deaths-covid-19/ |
| GIST | <p>The annual pace of Americans dying from cardiovascular-related causes accelerated during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic to the worst it has been since 2015, according to final figures gathered this month by the American Heart Association.</p> <p>In 2020, 928,741 deaths in the U.S. were blamed on cardiovascular issues, like heart disease and stroke — up from 874,613 in 2019. The age-adjusted rate of deaths also increased that year for the first time in a decade.</p> <p>"COVID-19 has both direct and indirect impacts on cardiovascular health. As we learned, the virus is associated with new clotting and inflammation. We also know that many people who had new or existing heart disease and stroke symptoms were reluctant to seek medical care," Dr. Michelle Albert, the association's vice president, said in a news release announcing the annual publication compiled by the association and the National Institutes of Health.</p> <p>Heart disease again made up the largest share of these deaths in 2020, at 41.2%, followed by stroke at 17.3%.</p> <p>The report just adds to the evidence of the wide-reaching toll the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic took on Americans' health and longevity. Earlier findings from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had tallied the rate of heart disease deaths worsening across every demographic group for 2020.</p> <p>"Prior to 2020, death rates from heart disease had been declining among adults for decades, which has been recognized by the CDC as one of the ten greatest public health achievements of the last century," the CDC's Rebecca Woodruff had said in a statement.</p> <p>However, not every part of the country had been seeing rates consistently improve before the pandemic setback.</p> <p>From 2011 to 2019, the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics counted age-adjusted heart disease death rates decreasing in only 15 states. Arkansas saw an increase and others saw rates plateau.</p> <p>Wide disparities also persist between demographic groups. More than half of men in every racial and ethnic group had cardiovascular disease from 2017 through 2020, ranging from 51.2% of White men to 58.9% of Black men.</p> <p>Black women had the highest rates of cardiovascular disease of any group, at 59.0%, compared to 44.6% of White women, 38.5% of Asian women, and 37.3% of Hispanic women.</p> <p>Cardiovascular deaths also saw the biggest increases in 2020 among Asian, Black, and Hispanic people, the publication reported, appearing to mirror some of the hardest-hit communities in the early wave of the pandemic.</p> <p>However, the heart association authors acknowledged this year's report remains "demonstrably incomplete" in tracking the risk and mortality of cardiovascular issues. Rates do not exist for racial and ethnic subgroups, nor for American Indian and Alaska Native people.</p> <p>"Mischaracterizing or erasing the diversity of populations threatens our ability to understand the sociocultural determinants that contribute to differences and disparities in health and disease, and to develop tailored strategies to improve the health of populations," Dr. Nilay Shah and Dr. Yvonne Commodore-Mensah, two authors of the publication, wrote in a statement.</p> |

COVID-19 and the heart

Experts have long warned that common heart conditions, like [coronary artery disease](#), were conclusively linked to raising a person's risk of severe COVID-19 illness and death.

In turn, a COVID infection can also affect the cardiovascular system in a [myriad of ways](#), ranging from damaging heart tissue to causing blood clots.

Studies have also pointed to concerning links between the pandemic and worsening risk factors that can underlie heart problems.

One study funded by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute [found](#) blood pressure increased during the first year of the pandemic, after months of relatively unchanged readings.

COVID-19 also led to broad disruptions in medical care for routine issues. One study published by the CDC [in June 2020](#) estimated 41% of adults had avoided medical care over COVID-19 concerns.

"This resulted in people presenting with more advanced stages of cardiovascular conditions and needing more acute or urgent treatment for what may have been manageable chronic conditions. And, sadly, appears to have cost many their lives," said Albert.

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| HEADLINE | 01/26 Russia strikes Ukraine with missiles |
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| SOURCE | https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ukraine-news-russia-says-tanks-show-us-nato-direct-involvement-growing/ |
| GIST | <p>Russia launched a wave of new missile and drone attacks against Ukraine Thursday, reportedly killing at least one person in the capital Kyiv and targeting the country's already-battered energy infrastructure in southern and central cities. The strikes forced officials to switch off the electricity in a couple regions to cope with reduced capacity.</p> <p>The air raid sirens wailing across the country, heralding the latest strike, came as Russia reacted to a landmark decision by U.S. President Joe Biden to supply Ukraine with modern, powerful M1 Abrams main battle tanks.</p> <p>While the 31 American tanks won't actually reach the battlefields of eastern Ukraine for months, given the need to train and equip Ukrainian forces to use the advanced hardware, the commitment from Mr. Biden came with a similar promise from Germany to send Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine — and to permit other European nations to send German-made Leopards from their stocks.</p> <p>Hundreds of Leopard tanks are sitting in military bases across Europe, and they can be delivered to Ukraine on a shorter timescale than the Abrams.</p> <p>Both the U.S. and Germany have said the aim is to give Ukrainian forces dozens of tanks, likely about 100, to enable them to punch through Russian front lines and retake occupied territory.</p> <p>The question is whether the tanks can be deployed in time to help the country stave off a new Russian offensive expected in the coming weeks or months — or to lead the charge in a Ukrainian counteroffensive against Moscow.</p> <p>Russia sent mixed signals in the wake of the Wednesday announcements by Washington and Berlin, playing down the strategic value of the Western military hardware to Ukraine, but also renewing warnings about the risks of the war growing into a wider regional conflict as NATO states increase their stake in the fight.</p> <p>"There are constant statements from European capitals, from Washington, that the sending of various weapons systems, including tanks, to Ukraine in no way means the involvement of these countries or the alliance [NATO] in the hostilities that are taking place in Ukraine," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov</p> |

said Thursday. "We categorically disagree with this... everything that the alliance I mentioned and the capital [Washington] does is perceived as direct involvement in the conflict, and we see that it is growing."

A senior Russian politician and ally of President Vladimir Putin cast a dire warning exactly one week ago of how Moscow might respond to a perceived military defeat in Ukraine.

"The defeat of a nuclear power in a conventional war can trigger a nuclear war," former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who now serves as deputy chairman of the Security Council, said in a post on the Telegram messaging app.

It's not clear exactly how long it will take European NATO countries to move Leopard 2 tanks into Ukraine in significant numbers and train the country's forces to use them, but Germany's leader said that training would begin on German soil within just days.

The [battle over territory in Ukraine's eastern Donbas](#) region, more than half of which is occupied by Russian forces, has been grueling. Tank battles have played out for months, with Ukraine relying on its stocks of Soviet-era hardware.

CBS News national security analyst H.R. McMaster, a former U.S. national security adviser and longtime battlefield commander, says the American tanks in particular — once they arrive — will give Ukraine a much-needed boost in firepower against the Russians.

"If the crew knows what it's doing, is well trained, does the preps, the fire checks, maintains that tank well, you just can't miss," he said, "and everything you hit is catastrophically destroyed."

The Leopards will also mark a significant upgrade, moving faster and packing more firepower and personnel armor than the tanks Ukraine currently has at its disposal.

But until the machines actually join the fight, the grueling back-and-forth battle — and Russia's devastating aerial assault — will likely grind on until one side launches a new offensive.

Ukraine said it shot down the majority of the missiles launched by Russia on Thursday, and all of the drones sent across the border. But the damage from the missile strikes to yet more of Ukraine's critical energy infrastructure, and the first death in Kyiv in weeks, were reminders that the war Putin launched almost one year ago is far from over.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Broken system for classifying information? |
| SOURCE | https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2023-01-25/americas-broken-system-for-classifying-information |
| GIST | <p>Gordon Adams, a former top White House official for national security budgets, learned quickly one day when his work brought him to the executive branch offices that the immovably strict rules governing his own handling of classified information did not apply to everyone within the administration the same way.</p> <p>"I remember walking into an office in the National Security Council and finding a prominent senior official sitting on the phone with their feet up talking about a particular issue with a 'secret' document open on their lap, which they were briefing from," recounts the former associate director for national security and international affairs at the Office of Management and Budget, "— talking to a reporter."</p> <p>The scene Adams witnessed — inside the office of an official he refuses to name — appeared to violate nearly every rule in the literal book governing the access and care of classified information that had been verbally and contractually hammered into him.</p> |

“The reality is there’s an information in-and-out game that’s played with classification. There’s a kind of voodoo mentality about how important it all is, and some of that is legitimate,” Adams says. And he adds notably, “we classify too much stuff.”

Every employee who receives the clearance to access classified information endures rigorous training on the procedures for handling it. Then, the same employees must be “read in” to a specific program or particular access in which a specialized official dictates its own terms of security to include, for example, not having the documents out in the open for passers-by to see, not discussing its contents on an unsecured communication line and certainly not revealing the sensitive information to member of the media.

But as everyday Americans have learned from a growing number of hotly politicized recent incidents, the mechanisms for classifying and handling sensitive information from presidents down the chains of command is not always clear.

The rules are frequently violated on purpose, such as the relaying of information to reporters. And accidental leaks, including when the staff of a retiring senior leader transports bulk documents from a secure facility into storage, happen so regularly that the National Archives has [a startlingly matter-of-fact set of instructions](#) for such instances on its public website – aligned with the actions reportedly taken by members of President Joe Biden’s staff when they made such a discovery at his archive and his private residence. The same appears to have been the case with former Vice President Mike Pence, whose lawyer told the Archives last week that classified documents were “inadvertently” boxed and taken to his home.

The circumstances remain murkier regarding caches of classified material found during an FBI search of President Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago residence last year, as the former commander in chief for months resisted cooperating with attempts to retrieve sensitive information.

In practice, the release of classified information as Adams explains “is extremely common and usually, not always, under guidance.” In the situation he witnessed, the administration sought to influence a public debate on a particular issue by strategically releasing information.

“Information is power, which is the bottom line,” says Adams, who addressed the ongoing debate about classified information in a recent blog post. “When you’re in the executive branch, information is the common currency. If you know something, keeping it or spreading it to the right people is an important part of politics. Letting in, or not letting in, is part of the politics.”

For many who have worked with the U.S. government’s system of classification, fault lies as much with the system itself as it does with those who knowingly leak or complicitly fail in their professional responsibilities.

“The American system of classifying information and declassifying information – in fact, the entire American system for thinking about classification – is 100% broken,” says Jeffrey Engel, founding director of Southern Methodist University’s Center for Presidential History.

One estimate from 2010 – at a time the Obama administration assured the American public it would enact transparency reforms – estimated anything from 50% to 90% of all the information marked classified did not need to be. Engel believes that number has only grown since then to as much as 99%, due in large part to broad failures in reforming that system and the compounding effect of the Information Age.

Add to that the fact that no government official or agency is solely responsible for declassifying information and that the cautious approach is to overclassify – since nobody has ever been fired for preventing secret documents from becoming public – and it becomes easier to see the exponential growth in government secrets. But it comes with consequences in an age of increasing public distrust in government and a growing obsession with conspiracy theories.

“What that means in English is, we have a country that is more worried about unknown threats and has – what number do you want to use – 100,000 times more electronic data,” Engel says. “No human could possibly go through all that.”

In addition to the political circumstances that Adams highlighted, the half-dozen former officials who described their experiences to U.S. News noted dramatic differences in the way classified information is handled by higher- and lower-ranking military or political officials.

A young Army private or even a member of Congress, for example, would generally only access classified information inside secure facilities where they would practice strictly enforced procedures for handling it. Top decision-makers, like the director of the CIA or the secretary of state, however, more routinely handle sensitive information.

And they might decide on their own the value of releasing it, Engel notes, such as when Henry Kissinger showed satellite imagery of staged Russian tanks to his Chinese counterparts as a part of President Richard Nixon’s historic outreach to Beijing in the 1970s.

The most urgent questions facing the current special counsel investigations is whether any of the politicians whose actions have drawn public scrutiny in recent weeks knowingly employed the classified information and whether it was for malevolent purposes.

Those who have worked with highly classified information lament how quickly the need to guard it can diminish. Consider, for example, the difference between protecting a plan for a U.S. infantry company to patrol through a particular village in a valley in Afghanistan the following day, compared to the need to restrict that same information a year or even a month later.

Yet those documents remain classified, and likely will, until someone petitions for their release.

The repeated calls for transparency from every presidential administration since World War II, Republican and Democrat, have yielded almost no optimism that the nature of the classification process will ever change, rather that it will become more cumbersome.

“Speaking from the perspective of a historian who is in constant struggle to get more documents out, the funnel we get every year gets narrower and narrower,” Engel says. “There’s a volume problem. And there’s an obsession with classification.”

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 SPD plan: follow up 911 calls with a survey |
| SOURCE | https://westseattleblog.com/2023/01/seattle-police-plan-to-follow-up-911-calls-with-surveys/ |
| GIST | These days it seems almost every transaction is followed up by a survey asking your opinion on how it went. Next to join the trend: The Seattle Police Department . Starting tomorrow (Thursday, January 26), SPD says many 911 callers and crime victims will get automated text/email messages – “once the 911 emergency has passed” – to “solicit feedback about the caller’s experience with SPD to improve services to the community.” The feedback solicitations will follow initial messages with the incident number and some general advice, as shown in examples here . SPD says it’s announcing this in advance so that people who start getting these messages don’t think they’re spam. The SPD announcement says the technology they’re using for this is from SPIDR Tech , an Arizona-based company that says it provides “the world’s first automated customer-service platform for public safety.” |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Many reasons credit union branches close |
| SOURCE | https://www.cutimes.com/2023/01/25/the-many-reasons-seattle-cu-decided-to-close-some-branches/?slreturn=20230026055810 |

Richard Romero, president/CEO of the \$1.1 billion Seattle Credit Union, admitted the city's crime rate was a factor when the decision was made to close two downtown branches.

But it was only one factor.

After the word got out earlier that the credit union was closing the branches because of the growing crime rates, it captured a lot of local headlines from several media outlets.

In December, the credit union sent an email to its 55,639 members stating that it was planning to close its Rainer and Georgetown branches in Seattle.

"Ensuring the physical safety of our members and staff both in and around our branch offices has become increasingly difficult at these locations," SCU's email read in part. "Your personal safety, as well as your financial well-being and banking preferences are important to us, representing the key variables in our decision."

One of the first reports from a local media outlet posted an article that SCU was closing the branches because of the city's rampant crime, and that it was doing so on the heels of Starbucks locations that also shuttered because of the same problem. That news organization, however, did not report there were other reasons for the branch closings, as some other local media outlets later reported.

"Our decision to close these branches has been weighed over several years. Each year we review branch usage patterns and a variety of metrics when deciding which branches are meeting business and member needs," Romero explained. "Over the past few years, branch foot traffic has declined 55% and 49% of transactions have moved to digital channels. The pandemic has had a major impact on transaction behavior and the adoption of electronic transactions."

In addition, SCU considered branch safety issues and the cost of providing a safe and secure environment for members and staff.

"In the end, we feel that with having other branches nearby and electronic services, we can continue to support these communities," Romero said.

Nevertheless, he acknowledged that crime is really high and it's a hot topic of concern with the city's businesses and residents.

Interestingly enough, however, crime has actually declined during the last year.

From 2020 to 2021 the reported incidents of violent crimes (homicide, rape, aggravated assault and robbery) increased from 4,466 to 5,340, which declined slightly to 5,245 reported violent crimes by the end of 2022, according to the Seattle Police Department.

What's more, from 2020 to 2021, reported property crimes (arson, burglary, larceny-theft and auto theft) increased from 43,180 to 47,389, but that number of reported property crimes also declined to 40,619 incidents at the end of last year, the Seattle Police Department reported on its website.

The Rainer branch officially closed last week and the Georgetown branch is scheduled to close on Feb. 3.

Romero said employees who worked at those branches have been assigned to other branches.

The credit union continues to operate four branches in Seattle's city limits, including its corporate headquarters, a downtown location and two other branches. SCU also runs five branches in Tacoma, Tukwila, Lynnwood, Burien and Kirkland, Wash.

Romero also noted that last year the credit union's headquarters had been downsized from a 45,000-square-foot building to a 5,000-square-foot building, and its staff has gone fully remote.

"We're a pretty nimble organization and we're going to change with the times," he said.

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| HEADLINE | 01/26 Day 337 of the Russia invasion |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/26/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-337-of-the-invasion |
| GIST | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Huge explosions shook Kyiv and raid sirens sounded across Ukraine on Thursday morning during a mass missile attack 24 hours after commitments were made by the US and Germany to send advanced battle tanks. There were reports of at least one person killed. A total of 30 missiles were said to be heading towards targets after Ukraine's air defences shot down 24 Iranian-made Shahad "kamikaze" drones overnight. • "We expect more than 30 missiles, which have already started to appear in various territories," said Yuriy Ignat, a Ukrainian military spokesperson. "Air defence systems are working". Another spokesperson later claimed that Ukraine's air defences had shot down 15 cruise missiles heading to Kyiv. • Kyiv's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, reported on Telegram that there had been explosions in the city. He wrote: "As a result of a rocket hitting a non-residential building in the Holosiiv district, there is currently information about one dead and two wounded. The injured were hospitalised by medics." • Russian missile strikes damaged energy infrastructure in Ukraine's southern port city of Odesa. No injuries were reported, but there were power blackouts and some residents reported an interruption to the water supply. There were also reports of explosions in Vinnitsia and Kherson. • The attacks came the day after Joe Biden approved sending 31 M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine. The US had resisted providing its own M1 Abrams tanks, citing maintenance and logistical challenges with the hi-tech vehicles. Earlier, the US president had spoken by phone with leaders Emmanuel Macron of France, Olaf Scholz of Germany, Giorgia Meloni of Italy and Rishi Sunak of Britain. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, thanked Biden for the "powerful decision" and described it as "an important step on the path to victory". • Germany also confirmed on Wednesday it will make 14 Leopard 2A6 tanks available for Ukraine's war effort. The chancellor, Olaf Scholz, also said his government plans to send further military support to Ukraine beyond the tanks. President Volodymyr Zelenskiy of Ukraine welcomed the decision, and said he was "sincerely grateful" to Scholz. • The key to providing tanks for Ukraine's defence against Russia was speed and sufficient numbers, Zelenskiy said on Wednesday. "The key now is speed and volumes. Speed in training our forces, speed in supplying tanks to Ukraine. The numbers in tank support," he said in his nightly video address. • Germany will also approve other European countries supplying German-made Leopard 2 tanks from their own stock. Finland, Spain and the Netherlands will contribute the same model, according to German media reports. A second battalion will be made up of Leopard 2A4 tanks from Poland and Norway. • The Russian embassy in Germany has accused Berlin of taking the conflict in Ukraine "to a new level of confrontation". The decision to approve the delivery of Leopard tanks to Ukraine means the "final refusal" of the German government "to recognise its "historical responsibility" to Moscow, ambassador Sergei Nechayev said in a statement. • Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that Moscow views sending tanks to Ukraine as "direct involvement in the conflict". He told reporters "There are constant statements from European capitals and from Washington that the sending of various weapons systems, including tanks, to Ukraine in no way means the involvement of these countries or Nato in the hostilities that are taking place in Ukraine. We categorically disagree. In Moscow, everything that both the alliance and the capitals I mentioned are doing is perceived as direct involvement in the conflict. We see that it is growing". • The secretary of Russia's security council, Nikolai Patrushev, one of President Vladimir Putin's closest allies, has also said on Thursday that the US and Nato were parties to the conflict in Ukraine and were seeking to drag out the fighting. • Viacheslav Chaus, the governor of Chernihiv, has confirmed that the region has been affected by a hack of the authority's IT systems. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A German citizen was arrested at Munich airport on suspicion of treason for allegedly passing intelligence onto Russia, the prosecutor general's office said on Thursday. • Ukraine's military spokesperson, Serhiy Cherevatyi, said Wednesday Ukrainian forces have withdrawn from the eastern town of Soledar in the Donetsk region, according to the country's state broadcaster Suspilne. The withdrawal of forces was made "in order to preserve the lives of service personnel", he said. His comments are the first Ukrainian confirmation of Soledar's capture by Russian forces. |
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| HEADLINE | 01/26 Ukraine: hotline for Russians to surrender |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/26/ukraine-hotline-encouraging-russians-to-surrender |
| GIST | <p>More than 6,500 Russian military personnel have sought to surrender through a bespoke "I want to live" hotline, Ukraine's government has claimed, with the call centre said to have been recently moved to a secret location to avoid Moscow interference.</p> <p>Vitaly Matvienko, spokesperson at the department for prisoners of war, said those who had made contact through the service had been verified as serving in the Russian forces using their personal data and service number.</p> <p>Between 15 September, when the hotline launched, and 20 January, it is claimed that 6,543 Russian personnel contacted the Ukrainian government to surrender themselves into their custody, often from the frontline.</p> <p>The hotline, fielded by 10 operators, had been established following Vladimir Putin's announcement of a mobilisation of 300,000 civilians with previous military experience to join the Russian war effort.</p> <p>Matvienko declined to comment on the number of completed surrenders but described the service, which is staffed 24/7, as "totally successful", with between 50 and 100 calls and messages to the service's Telegram channel being received every day.</p> <p>The call centre was moved a month ago from the department's Kyiv offices to a secret location due to fear of it being targeted by Russian attacks, he said.</p> <p>The propaganda value is clear for Ukraine's government, with 2 million people having visited the I want to live website in December alone, of which 1.6 million were in Russia.</p> <p>Those who have handed themselves in are offered the opportunity to be part of prisoner swaps arranged between the Russian and Ukrainian governments or to stay in custody with the potential to remain in Ukraine later or to emigrate.</p> <p>A total of 1,646 Ukrainian personnel have been released by the Russian government as part of such swaps, Matvienko said. The most recent deal was completed on 8 January when 50 personnel on each side were exchanged, with negotiations on others continuing.</p> <p>Matvienko said there were two stages to surrendering. "The first stage is Russian soldiers who are mobilised, partly mobilised, not mobilised yet, call to this hotline to this chatbot and say: 'I'm going to surrender,'" he said. "After that he is obligated to leave his personal data. After the soldier reaches Ukrainian territory, it's obligated for him to call again and say, 'I'm going to surrender' and Ukrainian operators help him to reach a safe place where he meets Ukrainian special forces."</p> <p>He said that the levels of interest on the service depended on developments on the battlefield. "During the liberation of Kherson, we had calls from Russians and they told us: 'Just save our souls because we got stuck somewhere in the mud, our battalion is totally crashed, we have 10 soldiers left, please take us from this mess.'"</p> |

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| | <p>Oksana, 25, one of the call centre handlers, said each call was different but that they all gave her hope that the Russian war effort was weakening. “Some people call and say, ‘I’m somewhere in the military. I want to surrender,’ others say, ‘I am afraid to be mobilised in Russia, what do I need to do’. And some of them tell me, ‘I’m on the territory or Ukraine, I want to surrender.’ They are afraid and they don’t know what to do.”</p> <p>Matvienko personally passes on “I want to live” business cards to the released prisoners as those who have been swapped have been found to have been later redeployed to the battlefield.</p> <p>The claims of the Ukrainian department for prisoners of war could not be independently verified.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/26 Israel West Bank raid leaves 9 dead |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/israeli-raid-in-west-bank-leaves-nine-palestinians-dead-11674726236?mod=hp_listb_pos1 |
| GIST | <p>Nine Palestinians were killed in a firefight between militants and Israeli security forces in a refugee camp during an Israeli raid in the West Bank on Thursday morning, according to Palestinian health officials, in the deadliest operation in months in the occupied territory.</p> <p>The Israeli army said troops entered the West Bank city of Jenin on Thursday as part of an operation targeting Palestinian militants. Soldiers killed at least six militants in the resulting battle, the army said.</p> <p>At least 146 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in 2022 in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, the highest toll since 2004, according to the Israeli human-rights group B’Tselem. Four Palestinians were killed in January 2022, according to the United Nations, compared with over 25 so far this month.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Tanks to Ukraine: not meant to escalate war |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/25/world/russia-ukraine-news#biden-announces-31-abrams-tanks-for-ukraine-but-says-the-move-is-not-meant-to-escalate-the-war https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/25/world/russia-ukraine-news#germany-leopard-tanks-ukraine |
| GIST | <p>WASHINGTON — President Biden announced on Wednesday that he would send M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine to help it defend against Russian invaders, a decision meant to unlock a wave of heavier aid by Western allies in preparation for an expected escalation of fighting in the spring.</p> <p>Speaking at the White House after a morning of telephone calls to European allies, Mr. Biden said that the United States would send 31 Abrams tanks, the equivalent of a Ukrainian battalion, and that Germany would follow through by contributing its own Leopard 2 tanks and freeing other allies to send their own, the equivalent of two more battalions.</p> <p>“These tanks are further evidence of our enduring, unflagging commitment to Ukraine and our confidence in the skill of Ukrainian forces,” Mr. Biden said, flanked by Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III.</p> <p>But he emphasized that the buildup was not meant to expand the war into Russia. “It is not an offensive threat to Russia,” he said. “There is no offensive threat to Russia. If Russian troops return to Russia, where they belong, this war would be over today.”</p> <p>President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, who has pressed for the tanks to counter Russia’s advantage in arms and men, expressed gratitude for the U.S. decision. Writing on Twitter, he called it “an important step</p> |

on the path to victory,” and said, “Today the free world is united as never before for a common goal — liberation of Ukraine,” with an icon of the country’s flag representing its name. “We’re moving forward.”

The Pentagon had long been reluctant to send the Abrams, in part because they are exceptionally complex machines that are challenging to operate and maintain. As it is, officials have said it could take [a year or even longer for them to actually reach the battlefield](#) in Ukraine.

But Mr. Austin came around to the move in order to spur Germany to send its own Leopard 2 tanks, which some military experts believe could be critical. [Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced](#) it had agreed to do so on Wednesday, just hours before Mr. Biden spoke.

Just last week, Mr. Scholz had refused to send the Leopards, or to allow other European countries to send their own German-built Leopards. The Germans made clear they would only back down and send the Leopards if the United States sent its own Abrams tanks.

Mr. Biden spoke with Mr. Scholz on Wednesday morning to coordinate his announcement, and also called Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of Britain, President Emmanuel Macron of France and Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of Italy.

“Germany has really stepped up,” Mr. Biden told reporters in the Roosevelt Room of the White House. When a reporter asked if Germany forced him to change his mind on the Abrams, the president said: “Germany didn’t force me to change my mind. I wanted to make sure we are all together.”

Mr. Biden noted that Wednesday was the birthday of President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine. The president recalled that when they met in Washington in December, he vowed to the visiting Ukrainian leader that “we’re with you as long as it takes.”

“Ukrainians are fighting an age-old battle against aggression and domination,” Mr. Biden added. “It’s a battle Americans have fought proudly time and again. And it’s a battle that we’re going to make sure Ukrainians are well equipped to fight as well.”

Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced on Wednesday that Germany would send an initial shipment of 14 Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine and allow other nations to send their own, relenting after [weeks of domestic and international pressure](#) to deliver armored vehicles aimed at helping Kyiv regain territory seized by Russia.

The move came hours before President Biden announced that the United States will [send M1 Abrams tanks](#) to Ukraine, appearing to assuage Mr. Scholz’s reluctance to send tanks without Washington also doing so.

Berlin’s decision to send the German-made Leopard 2s follows [Britain’s announcement this month](#) that it would send 14 of its Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine, and is a significant step in Western allies’ supply of ever heavier weapons to Kyiv.

While the pledges so far fall short of the 300 tanks that Ukraine has said it needs to make a difference against Russian forces on the battlefield, Germany’s announcement prompted officials in Finland, the Netherlands, Spain and [Norway](#) to say that they would seek to send tanks to Ukraine, or were open to doing so.

Ukraine’s pleas for more advanced weapons have taken on added urgency in recent weeks as Russia prepares for a possible new offensive, and as Ukrainian forces are locked in a withering battle of attrition against Russian troops in the east. On Wednesday, Ukraine’s military acknowledged that [it had retreated](#)

[from Soledar](#), a small salt-mining town near Bakhmut, a strategic eastern city that Russian forces have been fighting to capture in months of brutal trench warfare and artillery battles.

The first tanks could take several months to arrive on the battlefield, but Germany's decision to authorize other nations to transfer their own Leopards — which are widely distributed in more than a dozen other European countries — could eventually help Ukrainian forces dent Russia's advantage in troop numbers and equipment. Poland said on Tuesday that it [had sought Germany's permission](#) to send Leopard tanks from its own stocks.

"We're talking about very effective weapons systems here, and it's proper that we never provide those weapons systems alone, but always in close cooperation," Mr. Scholz told lawmakers in Germany's Parliament.

Ukraine's allies have sought to strengthen its military without prompting Russia to further escalate the war, and [some leaders had worried](#) that battle tanks might cross that line.

Mr. Scholz defended the time he took making the decision. "We always have to make it very clear in everything we do that we are doing what is necessary and what is possible to support Ukraine," he said. "But at the same time we are preventing the war from escalating into a war between Russia and NATO."

The German government said that it would send 14 Leopard 2 A6 tanks directly from its army stock. It said it would send another similarly sized group in a second step, but did not say when, or specify where they would come from.

The Leopard 2, first introduced in 1979, is used by 13 European armies, [according to the European Council on Foreign Relations](#), and together, these militaries have an estimated 2,000 vehicles.

It is one of the world's leading battle tanks and would offer a big step forward in capability for Ukraine, which has been using Soviet-era tanks.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Russia ire, defiance: tanks 'losing scheme' |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/25/world/russia-ukraine-news#russia-ukraine-tanks |
| GIST | <p>Russian officials reacted with defiance and ire to the swift succession of announcements on Wednesday that Germany and the United States would send Western tanks to Ukraine.</p> <p>Within hours of one another, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that Germany would send an initial shipment of 14 Leopard 2 tanks and President Biden announced plans to send 31 M1 Abrams tanks. The moves were intended to unlock a wave of aid by Western allies before an expected escalation of fighting in the spring, or earlier.</p> <p>Dmitri Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, said that delivering American M1 Abrams and German Leopard 2 tanks to Kyiv would be a "losing scheme" that would burden Europe without strengthening the Ukrainian military, according to Tass, the Russian state-run news agency, warning the tanks would "go up in flames."</p> <p>"They cost a lot and all this burden will be primarily shouldered by European taxpayers," he said.</p> <p>Similarly, a Russian lawmaker and former commander of the Russian Air Force, Viktor N. Bondarev, told Tass that the tanks would not significantly impact the Russian campaign in Ukraine, but that attention must be paid to destroying them.</p> <p>Stronger sentiments were expressed by the Russian ambassadors to Germany and the United States. Sergey Nechaev, the ambassador to Germany, said in a statement that Berlin's decision was "highly dangerous" and "takes the conflict to a new level of confrontation."</p> |

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| | <p>Mr. Nechaev said the move suggested that Germany and Western allies were not interested in a diplomatic resolution of the war in Ukraine and “is bent on its permanent escalation.”</p> <p>Anatoly Antonov, Russia’s U.S. ambassador, said in a statement on Tuesday that the expected U.S. provision of tanks to Kyiv would be “another blatant provocation” against Russia and would signal a proxy war with his country.</p> <p>President Biden took note of such concerns in his announcement on Wednesday, saying that the provision of tanks was “not an offensive threat,” adding, “If Russian troops return to Russia, where they belong, this war would be over today.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Ukraine orders forces to retreat out Soledar |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/25/world/russia-ukraine-news#ukraine-soledar-retreat |
| GIST | <p>Ukrainian forces have retreated from the small town of Soledar following weeks of bitter fighting, a military spokesman said on Wednesday, acknowledging a military gain for Russian forces that brings them closer to encircling and possibly capturing the strategic eastern city of Bakhmut.</p> <p>Col. Sergei Cherevaty, the spokesman for Ukraine’s eastern military command, said that the retreat from Soledar was ordered “to preserve our personnel.”</p> <p>“Russian forces spent colossal resources in lives and equipment in the effort to take Soledar while Ukraine was able to preserve its forces and prevent encirclement,” he said in an interview.</p> <p>Soledar, which had a prewar population of around 10,000 people, is six miles northeast of Bakhmut, a city in the eastern part of Ukraine known as Donbas. President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has sought to fully capture Donbas, which includes two regions — Donetsk and Luhansk. Russian forces have since last summer both shelled Bakhmut and fought for the towns surrounding it, aiming to secure high ground from which to position artillery and also to cut off roads used by Ukraine to reinforce its troops defending the city.</p> <p>Pavlo Kyrylenko, the head of the Ukrainian military administration in Donetsk, which includes Soledar, said on Tuesday that Russian forces had shelled a string of towns in the region including Paraskoviivka, which is just west of Soledar. One person died in that attack, he said.</p> <p>Moscow has held significant territory in Donbas since 2014, including two regional capitals. But since seizing two key cities in Luhansk last summer, Russia’s military advances in Donbas have been slow. Both Russian and Ukrainian forces have sustained heavy casualties in intense shelling and trench warfare. In recent weeks, soldiers also have had to endure bitter cold and mud.</p> <p>The capture of Soledar marks a victory for the Kremlin but also for Yevgeny V. Prigozhin, the founder of the Wagner private military company, which has spearheaded much of Russia’s fighting around Bakhmut. Mr. Prigozhin, a close associate of Mr. Putin, has billed the battle for Bakhmut as a measure of the effectiveness of his fighting force.</p> <p>Wagner said earlier this month that Soledar had fallen, and military experts have said since last week that Ukraine appeared to have retreated. Wagner also said last week that it had captured the village of Klishchiivka, a few miles south of Bakhmut, in a further sign of its progress toward encircling the city. There was no comment from the Ukrainian military about that claim.</p> <p>Russian forces “are already increasing pressure” in the direction of Bakhmut, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said in a speech late on Tuesday, adding: “And they want to increase pressure on a larger scale.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Olympics opens to Russia, Belarus athletes? |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/25/world/russia-ukraine-news#olympic-officials-prepare-the-way-for-russian-and-belarusian-athletes-to-compete-in-the-paris-games |
| GIST | <p>Despite protests from Ukraine, the International Olympic Committee on Wednesday continued to move toward permitting individual athletes from Russia and Belarus to compete in the 2024 Paris Olympics as so-called neutral participants, not under their nations' flags.</p> <p>"No athlete should be prevented from competing just because of their passport," the I.O.C. said in a statement after a meeting of its executive board, adding that a pathway for Russian and Belarusian athletes should be "further explored."</p> <p>Wednesday's statement followed remarks last month by Thomas Bach, the Olympic Committee president, who said that he supported the inclusion of Russian and Belarusian athletes at the Paris Games even if the war in Ukraine continued. The United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee said at the time that it approved the idea.</p> <p>If allowed into the Games, Russian and Belarusian athletes would not wear uniforms bearing their countries' names or colors, and no government or state officials from the two nations would be permitted to attend. To gain eligibility, Russian and Belarusian athletes must not have actively supported the war in Ukraine and must have passed antidoping protocols.</p> <p>In recent Olympics, after a state-sponsored system of doping was uncovered, Russia has been barred from participating as a nation, but individual athletes have competed. This is the path the I.O.C. is expected to follow for Russian participation in the Paris Games.</p> <p>Wednesday's I.O.C. statement came a day after President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said he had told President Emmanuel Macron of France in a phone call that Russian athletes should have "no place" in the Paris Games.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/26 War accelerates shift Europe power to east |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/26/world/europe/eu-nato-power-ukraine-war.html |
| GIST | <p>BRUSSELS — In August, in Prague, the chancellor of Germany, Olaf Scholz, said it bluntly: "The center of Europe is moving eastward."</p> <p>Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been a shock to the complacent European order, both to the European Union and to NATO. And it has underscored and enhanced the influence of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.</p> <p>Poland and the Baltic states have driven the moral argument to support Ukraine, filling a near-vacuum early in the war, when Europe's traditional leaders, France and Germany, appeared paralyzed. But the war has also brought new urgency and energy for the enlargement of the European Union to the Western Balkans and beyond, with offers of candidacy for Ukraine and Moldova.</p> <p>Vocal pressure from Eastern and Central Europe was crucial to the decisions this week, after months of wrangling and resistance, to give Western tanks to Ukraine. On Wednesday, Mr. Scholz announced that his country would supply some of its Leopard 2 tanks and allow other countries to send theirs, and President Biden said he would send American Abrams tanks, which gave Mr. Scholz the political cover he wanted.</p> <p>The war is also accelerating what Mr. Scholz implied: that the balance of power in Europe is shifting, too, along with its center, away from "Old Europe," which valued and cultivated its ties to Moscow, to the newer members to the east and north, with their raw memories of Soviet occupation and their reluctance to cede chunks of their reestablished sovereignty to Brussels.</p> |

“Scholz is right,” said Timothy Garton Ash, a European historian at Saint Antony’s College, Oxford. “The voices of Central and Eastern Europeans are being listened to more and taken more seriously in the councils of Europe, and there is a big eastern enlargement agenda on the table.”

With a major war within its borders, Europe is more about hard power now than before, he said. “So having a Central and Eastern Europe that takes security seriously has an impact.”

Poland has a rapidly expanding military — the government said last year that it planned to [double the size](#) of the country’s armed forces — and has ordered a large amount of sophisticated new arms, making it a more important player in both the European Union and in NATO.

Poland was a prime lobbyist [to try to convince a reluctant Berlin](#) to send German tanks to Ukraine and authorize other countries to do so.

“Power has moved east, and Ukraine will cement this trend,” said Jana Puglierin, Berlin director of the European Council on Foreign Relations. One can extrapolate too much from the Ukraine war, she said, “but you see the clear pattern in moral leadership.”

Central and Eastern European countries, Ms. Puglierin said, see themselves as “the freedom fighters in the E.U. and defending its values, standing up to dictatorship.” They feel vindicated in their longstanding warnings about Russia’s neo-imperialism, its president, Vladimir V. Putin, and Europe’s dependence on Russian energy — in contrast to what they see as Western Europe’s naïveté about diplomacy and trade with Russia.

Acting early to provide Ukraine military support and to welcome refugees, these countries have helped shape the narrative for Europe, while “in Berlin and Paris, too, there was such a vacuum, negotiating with Putin to the last and surprised by the invasion,” Ms. Puglierin said. “The eastern countries were quick movers and much more credible, and we were speechless and frozen.”

Germany and France have also had to confront the failure of their traditional policy of European security with Russia, not against it. President Emmanuel Macron of France persists in hoping to be part of any future peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, going so far as to talk of giving Russia security guarantees, which has enraged many in Europe, not just in the east.

The war has also made Mr. Macron’s aspiration for an “autonomous” European defense seem hollow, given the sharply enhanced role of NATO and the United States in the past year.

“The eastern countries are not big fans of E.U. defense — they want the United States and NATO,” Ms. Puglierin said. Germany, too, wants to enhance the trans-Atlantic relationship and depends on Washington, even as it tries to rebuild its own paltry military. “So France will lose some allies and be outnumbered,” she said.

Weakened within Europe, at least for now, France will also be less influential in a more active and aggressive NATO. The alliance is more reliant on American arms and leadership than it was before the war, not less so, and it is expected to expand soon with [the new membership of Sweden and Finland](#).

Germany’s [new government](#), led by Mr. Scholz, was unprepared for war, let alone for a sudden cutoff of Russian energy and trade. With rising concern about similar dependence on China, Germany faces the need to reshape its export-driven economy, built on cheap Russian gas and unfettered trade with China.

In the longer run, “the prospect of a larger and more eastern Europe will be a source of great strength for the German economy,” Mr. Garton Ash said, with Ukraine representing a vast potential for development. Still, France and Germany are on the back foot in Europe for the near future, at least.

Luuk van Middelaar, a historian of the European Union, notes that since the war began, both Poland and Hungary have been treated more gently by Brussels in the ongoing struggle with them [over the rule of law](#).

“Politically and morally, Poland is off the hook because of the role it plays as a frontline state, delivering arms and accepting refugees,” he said.

“Poland’s new importance to NATO also makes it more important to” the European Union, said Wojciech Przybylski of Res Publica, a Warsaw-based research institution. “The volume of purchases of new equipment and upgrade of defense systems makes it a country that you must talk to when discussing security assurances and peace.”

Central and Eastern Europe, he said, “delivers a lot of attitude, even if the substance is still in the hands of the bigger players.” The war, he added, “has confirmed the reality that Europe can no longer be ruled from Paris and Berlin.”

Hans Kundnani of Chatham House, who has written extensively about Germany and the European Union, sees a psychological shift in Europe. “The Poles and Central Europeans feel more confident, and the French and Germans are more defensive,” he said.

There is no question that politically, and even in terms of cultural values, Central and Eastern European countries “have pulled Europe to the right,” Mr. Kundnani said. “There is a resurgence of neoconservatism against the backdrop of Ukraine. The danger is that it splits Europe rather than uniting it.”

But the power of Brussels is based on economies and population sizes, he said, so Europe’s center of gravity remains in the West. For the newly assertive countries in the east, he said, “I’m not convinced that confidence and the high moral ground are enough to accomplish big things in Brussels.”

Mr. van Middelaar, like Mr. Kundnani, draws a distinction between rhetorical influence that can help shape public opinion, including “the media enjoying snappy quotes from Baltic and Polish ministers,” and structural change. “A lot of stuff in the E.U. is not about Russia, the war or defense, and for these issues the balance of power hasn’t changed so much,” he said. “France and Germany are still pretty central to these economic debates.”

But even there, the power of the French-German “couple” has been waning for some time. Mr. van Middelaar drew a comparison between the war in Ukraine and another tectonic shock to Europe, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany.

François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl, the French and German leaders in that earlier time, had fierce conflicts over reunification, but they had been working closely together for years. When Russia invaded Ukraine, Mr. Scholz, who had been in office less than three months, and Mr. Macron barely knew one another.

“There was no working relationship or professional intimacy, which you need at such moments,” Mr. van Middelaar said, so there has been “a lot of internal suspicion” and “underlying discomfort about how to deal with this new continent where Russia is a foe and Germany has to rethink its economic and political model.”

That has created a void in leadership that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have tried aggressively to fill.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 DHS releases 1100 criminals from detention |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/25/dhs-released-1100-criminals-detention-december/ |
| GIST | The Homeland Security Department released more than 1,100 illegal immigrants with criminal records from its detention facilities in December as it sought to make room for a border surge that never materialized. |

Deportation officers said they were told to stop making arrests and clear space for the impact expected with a change in a pandemic border policy. The data, released this month by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, shows the extent of the moves.

ICE said it released 515 migrants with criminal convictions and 641 facing active criminal charges.

Officers said the releases were tied to the Title 42 pandemic border policy, which under a court order was supposed to disappear just before Christmas. The Homeland Security Department said already record levels of border chaos could triple, and they were clearing space out of ICE facilities to try to hold some of the most egregious border violators.

Ultimately, the Supreme Court ordered that Title 42 remain in place while it hears and considers arguments. Although illegal border crossings increased, the cataclysmic surge did not materialize.

That made the releases all the more aggravating, said R.J. Hauman, head of government relations at the Federation for American Immigration Reform.

“What they did in December in anticipation of the Title 42 ruling that never came down was yet another act of enforcement theater that jeopardizes public safety and the integrity of our system,” Mr. Hauman told The Washington Times.

Detaining illegal immigrants awaiting deportation is supposed to be the norm, particularly for those caught at the border.

Yet the sheer size of the border chaos and the Biden administration’s antipathy toward detention mean beds go unused while illegal immigrants are released into the country.

The criminals represented just a fraction of December releases, which totaled 20,279. That was up more than 80% from the averages in October and November.

ICE was using only a little more than 20,000 detention beds in early January despite being funded for an average of 34,000 beds on any given day.

As of this week, ICE was holding 23,030 people, nearly 11,000 below the daily capacity.

ICE didn’t respond to an inquiry for this article.

Tom Homan, who led ICE during the first part of the Trump administration, told The Times that all detention decisions are now made by a political appointee, not career staffers.

Mr. Homan said the appointee is trying to push toward release rather than detention.

“The sad thing is this: There are many empty beds sitting empty already paid,” he said.

Part of the problem appears to be about money siphoned to groups that are chummy with the Biden team, Mr. Horman said. That includes nongovernmental organizations that the government pays to help settle released immigrants in communities and for-profit companies that oversee the monitoring programs that track some of the migrants on release through phone check-ins.

Mr. Homan said detention is the crux of enforcement. If illegal immigrants can be detained, then they can be deported. The vast majority of those released end up staying, either by delaying their court cases or ignoring deportation rulings once they are issued.

“They are in the wind waiting for the next amnesty deal,” Mr. Homan said.

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| | <p>ICE has two types of releases from detention. One is bonding out either by a judge or by ICE. The other is a discretionary release by ICE, either on an order of recognizance or an order of supervision or through the homeland security secretary's power of parole.</p> <p>Bond releases of criminals were up just 10% in December, but ICE's discretionary releases of criminals rose 66%.</p> <p>That came to 1,156 total criminal releases, 515 of them with convictions and the other 641 with pending charges.</p> <p>ICE records don't detail the types of crimes involved.</p> <p>In addition to cutting criminals loose, ICE stopped pursuing new targets in the field.</p> <p>One ICE officer said his region was instructed not to make any further arrests because of a lack of detention space.</p> <p>The result is that ICE officers booked in just 5,950 people in December, down from roughly 6,500 in October and November, according to data kept by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University.</p> <p>In the Trump years, pre-pandemic, ICE regularly booked in double that number per month.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 DHS: illegal border crossings drop; 'parole' |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/25/dhs-says-illegal-border-crossings-plummet-after-ne/ |
| GIST | <p>Homeland Security said Wednesday that illegal border crossings of key nationalities have plummeted after the department began a new program that converts would-be illegal immigrants into legal arrivals.</p> <p>The program applies to Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans giving them a chance to apply for permission to enter from their home countries. Those who do show up at the border without first applying can be expelled.</p> <p>Homeland Security claimed a 97% drop in people from those countries jumping the border as of this week, compared to early December.</p> <p>The department acknowledged that illegal crossings from other nationalities are still rising, and said that's proof that the parole program is the critical piece of the border security puzzle.</p> <p>"These expanded border enforcement measures are working," Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said.</p> <p>Under the program, up to 30,000 Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans are to be admitted into the country each month under Mr. Mayorkas' parole powers. That grants them a tentative permission to be here, and offers them work permits, which carry some taxpayer benefits.</p> <p>Those applying are supposed to have sponsors in the U.S. who promise to support them financially.</p> <p>Critics said Mr. Mayorkas hasn't decreased the number of people coming, but rather found a way to hide the border chaos by giving migrants a direct route to the U.S. interior.</p> <p>The new numbers were released a day after 20 GOP-led states filed a lawsuit challenging the legality of the parole program.</p> <p>They say the administration has essentially created a new guest-worker program on its own, outside of the laws written by Congress.</p> |

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| | Mr. Mayorkas on Wednesday blasted the states for the lawsuit, calling it “incomprehensible” that the states would object to something that reduced “irregular” migration. |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 IG: NIH failed track US funds to Wuhan lab |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/25/nih-failed-track-how-chinas-wuhan-virus-lab-was-sp/ |
| GIST | <p>The federal government missed warning signs from the lab at the center of the coronavirus controversy, allowing U.S. money to flow to the Wuhan Institute of Virology without adequate oversight of what the Chinese scientists were doing, an inspector general reported Wednesday.</p> <p>The National Institutes of Health funded the EcoHealth Alliance, a New York-based nonprofit, which in turn sent money to Wuhan for research on emerging viruses. NIH ordered EcoHealth to keep a close eye on the research and to report back if there were signs that the research was producing “enhanced growth” of deadly viruses.</p> <p>Wuhan crossed that line but EcoHealth failed to raise the alarm, the Health and Human Services Department’s inspector general said.</p> <p>The new report does not conclude that the coronavirus emerged from the Wuhan lab and does not tie U.S. funding to the virus. But the audit does say the federal government was sending money over without adequate controls on how it was being spent.</p> <p>“Despite identifying potential risks associated with research being performed under the EcoHealth awards, NIH did not effectively monitor or take timely action to address EcoHealth’s compliance with some research requirements,” the inspector general concluded.</p> <p>Even now, the National Institutes of Health still can’t say exactly what Wuhan was doing with American taxpayers’ money in 2019, just before the coronavirus pandemic struck. That’s because the lab has stopped responding to U.S. requests.</p> <p>The report said EcoHealth should clean up its monitoring and reporting before the U.S. pays the outfit any more money.</p> <p>The audit also said HHS should order EcoHealth to refund nearly \$90,000 in money the group spent on items beyond the scope of the agreement.</p> <p>Sen. Joni Ernst, the Iowa Republican who requested the audit, said it’s time to cut off all taxpayer money from EcoHealth.</p> <p>“While NIH certainly shares in the blame, EcoHealth Alliance is ultimately at fault for failing to tell the world what was really going on at China’s Wuhan Institute,” she said. “They are guilty of either complacency or a cover-up, or maybe a little of both.”</p> <p>She added: “EcoHealth was paid millions, promising their hunt for bat viruses would protect the world from a pandemic ... Well, the world got a pandemic, and EcoHealth keeps getting millions.”</p> <p>Since the start of the pandemic, EcoHealth has continued to win contracts from Uncle Sam, she said — including a new \$3 million award from the Pentagon last month.</p> <p>Some Republicans said the new report shows that NIH needs its own inspector general dedicated to policing the research giant’s spending.</p> <p>“NIH continues to act as an autonomous government agency and forego policies that strictly regulate the grant award process,” said Sen. Roger Marshall, Kansas Republican. “The agency’s lack of grant oversight</p> |

and management jeopardizes the integrity of federally funded research and leaves Americans vulnerable to dangerous pathogen outbreaks from lab accidents.”

Both NIH and EcoHealth told the inspector general they have taken steps to improve their monitoring and reporting.

But EcoHealth disputed the finding that it didn’t alert NIH that the research in Wuhan had crossed lines in terms of virus growth. For one thing, EcoHealth said it wasn’t clear what NIH meant by requiring EcoHealth to “immediately notify” of signs that virus research had turned more dangerous. EcoHealth also said it did raise the issue in one of its yearly reports.

The inspector general said that didn’t qualify as an immediate notification.

EcoHealth also bristled at being dinged for Wuhan’s refusal to turn over research NIH has requested, suggesting it was NIH who blew all leverage with Wuhan by canceling its money in early 2020, then months later asking for the lab to divulge its work. The ensuing pandemic also didn’t help grease the skids for cooperation.

“These conditions and particularly the political tensions between the Chinese and U.S. governments at the time effectively shut down communications among scientists at the WIV (a Chinese government laboratory) and EcoHealth Alliance staff, making it impossible for EcoHealth Alliance to secure the requested data,” said Peter Daszak, EcoHealth’s president, in an official response to the audit.

The inspector general acknowledged those roadblocks but said EcoHealth was required by federal regulations to ensure access to Wuhan’s research.

EcoHealth was trying to keep tabs. The audit found its staff met with lab personnel at least 20 times between June 2014 and December 2019. That included annual visits to Wuhan.

But EcoHealth bungled its funding agreement with Wuhan, leaving out required information and failing to get Wuhan to report on what it was doing in the latter years of the project.

EcoHealth agreed to return some money the inspector general said was improperly paid — but the outfit said it also discovered another \$126,391 it should have been paid. EcoHealth said it is asking Uncle Sam to pay up.

The audit revealed bizarre levels of bureaucratic bungling.

EcoHealth was supposed to submit a progress report each year. In 2019, the fifth year of the five-year grant, EcoHealth said it tried to upload a report to NIH’s system but was locked out of the file apparently because NIH had already approved a new five-year renewal.

NIH didn’t flag the unfiled report and EcoHealth didn’t alert NIH to the problem, figuring that the renewal signaled NIH’s ongoing satisfaction with what the outfit was doing.

Investigators said the report would eventually be filed in August 2021 — more than two years after it was supposed to have been submitted, and more than a year after the pandemic washed over the globe.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 SPD cop car hits woman in crosswalk, dies |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/local/woman-hit-and-killed-by-seattle-police-vehicle-identified-pedestrian-traffic-south-lake-union-washington-king-county# |
| GIST | SEATTLE — A 23-year-old woman hit and killed by a Seattle police patrol vehicle Monday night in the South Lake Union neighborhood was in the crosswalk when she was hit, police said |

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| | <p>The King County Medical Examiner and Northeastern University officials confirmed the woman's identity as Jaahnavi Kandula and determined the cause of death as multiple blunt force injuries.</p> <p>A police officer was responding in a patrol vehicle to an urgent "priority one" shortly after 8 p.m. Monday when the officer's vehicle hit the woman near the intersection of Dexter Avenue North and Thomas Street, police said.</p> <p>Responding officers found the woman with life-threatening injuries and performed CPR before firefighters arrived and took her to Harborview Medical Center where she later died of her injuries.</p> <p>A spokesperson with the Seattle Police Department clarified that the officer was responding to the call "with the Seattle Fire Department". SPD has previously said that they were responding "at the request of the Seattle Fire Department."</p> <p>Kandula was a graduate student at Northeastern University in Seattle. The college said she came to Seattle from Bengaluru, India in 2021 to pursue a Master of Science in Information Systems at the College of Engineering.</p> <p>She was set to graduate in December 2023.</p> <p>"Jaahnavi is remembered as a stellar student and a delightful and effervescent human being. She was a close friend to many and friends shared that they loved her bubbly laugh, sense of humor, and infectious personality. Her loss will be felt deeply by students, staff, and faculty across campus," David Thurman Dean of Northeastern University said in a letter to students Wednesday.</p> <p>Detectives from the Seattle Police Department's traffic collision investigation squad are leading an investigation.</p> <p>Police have not released further details and have declined to identify the officer however they said the officer has been with the department since November 2019.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Convention center expansion brings hope |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/local/convention-center-expansion-brings-hopes-for-downtown-revitalization-washington-seattle-business-commerce-hyatt-hotel-police-crime-homelessness# |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE, Wash. — People downtown are hopeful about the Seattle Convention Center expansion attracting visitors and making the area safer for people who live and work there.</p> <p>The Downtown Seattle Association (DSA) said the city has won the lottery with this building that's expected to attract thousands upon thousands of people year-round, spending money at small businesses and leaving tax dollars to support city services.</p> <p>Aaron Blutworth's company helps organize expo services nationwide and attended Wednesday's ribbon cutting.</p> <p>"Just a huge economic impact," Blutworth added. "I mean, the power of centers, they talk in billions, you know, not millions, especially in large cities like Seattle. It's a pretty unbelievable facility. Seattle's done very well with this building."</p> <p>It's a benefit to local businesses like the neighboring Hyatt. A spokesperson said they're excited about the return of big group business and have been waiting for years for this expansion.</p> <p>As for those who are in the downtown core often, people, including Cathy Slater from Seattle are hoping convention center traffic can help make the area more inviting.</p> |

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| | <p>"I'm very concerned about crime, homelessness, drugs," Slater said. "I think Seattle used to be such a great place for people to come and visit and eat and walk their families downtown, and we've lost a lot of that before covid and clearly during covid."</p> <p>The Seattle Police Crime dashboard shows 104 violent crimes reported last year in this stretch of downtown, a drop from the year prior.</p> <p>"We're seeing fewer violent crimes than we were a year ago," Downtown Seattle Association President/CEO Jon Scholes. "We see fewer people sleeping outside in tents, so we're making progress to make downtown safe, healthy, and welcoming."</p> <p>This grand opening comes at a time when the DSA reports the area is seeing more people returning to work in person, getting apartments there, and monthly foot traffic is on the upswing.</p> <p>"This building sort of rocket fuels the downtown's recovery and revitalization," Scholes stated. "We're headed in the right direction. No doubt we still have challenges, but we're on our way back, and this building's a big part of that."</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 February forecast as La Nina slowly fades |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/local/forecast-winter-la-nina-puget-sound-seattle-weather-meteorology-climate-washington-pacific-northwest-snow# |
| GIST | <p>WASHINGTON — "Puget Sound winters are easy!" was the plea to my Pennsylvania parents to convince them to make the cross-country move to Washington state.</p> <p>The promise of sunny summers & mild winters was enough to lure them to the Pacific Northwest late last year after retirement.</p> <p>It's true, after all. Rarely does western Washington endure days on end of nostril-freezing cold like in Minnesota, nor do we deal with crippling blizzards like in New England.</p> <p>Our proximity to the mild Pacific Ocean and cold-blocking Cascade Range provides Puget Sound with stress-free winters, for the most part.</p> <p>So imagine my mother's surprise when she woke up to 15 inches of snow on the ground a few days before their first Pacific Northwest Christmas.</p> <p>I had to fess up. Yes, the lowlands occasionally have bouts of winter snow. But what snow accumulates on the ground usually melts after a few days, unlike most areas east of the Rockies.</p> <p>And sure, we've dealt with our fair share of cold spells. In the winter of 1969, Seattle shivered during a record-setting ten consecutive days of sub-freezing temperatures.</p> <p>La Niña has limped through this winter of 2022-23, as equatorial sea surface temperatures have trended below normal across the vast Pacific Ocean. Conditions like this tend to bring cool, wet winters to western Washington.</p> <p>So, has this La Niña winter lived up to its damp reputation?</p> <p>For recordkeeping purposes, meteorologists break down the seasons into three-month groupings based on the calendar and annual temperature. Meteorological winter includes December, January, and February.</p> <p>Certainly, December 2022 was cold. The average monthly temperature was 39 degrees, a solid 3 degrees below normal. December was also snowy, with 4.9 inches of snow in total. For comparison, Seattle averages 6 inches of snow for an entire winter season.</p> |

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| | <p>This January, on the other hand, has trended slightly warmer than normal by 2 degrees. And this month has been dry, with precipitation 1.5 inches below normal with only a trace of snow.</p> <p>As La Niña slowly fades away in February, slightly wetter and cooler conditions are favored next month.</p> <p>And after a slight uptick in average monthly precipitation in March, our seasonal dry spell of weather typically takes over soon thereafter.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Bidding wars return Seattle house market? |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-housing-market-real-estate-home-sales-listed-pending-sold-redfin-brokerage-bidding-war-mortgage-rate-application-washington-state-recover-normal-covid-pandemic# |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE — Redfin agents say bidding wars are back in the Puget Sound as the housing market has begun to recover from a low point in the second week of November.</p> <p>According to a new Redfin report, the number of Redfin users requesting first tours increased 17% since the second week of November, and the number of people contacting Redfin agents to start the homebuying process surged 13%. Compared to a year ago, however, home tours and requests for service are down 23% and 27%, respectively, per the Seattle-based real estate brokerage.</p> <p>Redfin agents said in the report bidding wars have returned in Seattle, central Florida and Richmond, Va., as homebuyers have started to come off the sidelines. Other areas of the country have not awoken from their housing slumbers quite yet, Redfin said.</p> <p>“Bidding wars are back in Seattle,” Redfin real estate agent Shoshana Godwin said in the company's press release. “One of our Issaquah listings got 12 offers and is under contract for \$155,000 over the \$1.4 million list price. The buyer waived every contingency, handed over \$300,000 of earnest money and is letting the seller stay for free for two months after closing.</p> <p>"Another home in Seattle’s popular Ballard neighborhood was recently delisted after sitting on the market for over three months. The seller relisted it last week and it went pending in under a day.”</p> <p>Godwin said homeowners are hesitant to list because they "previously heard that there’s no demand from buyers," thus making the market more competitive because of the lack of inventory.</p> <p>According to Redfin's December data, the median sales price in Seattle dropped .64% to \$770,000 year-over-year, while the median days on market climbed to 30, up from 12 a year ago.</p> <p>Redfin reported mortgage applications are up 28% from early November as the average 30-year fixed rate declined by nearly 1% and now sits around 6%.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Officials: Cascadia earthquake ‘overdue’ |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news-brief-newsletter/marking-the-anniversary-of-the-last-big-one-cascadia-earthquake-overdue-officials-say# |
| GIST | <p>PORTLAND, Ore. — Thursday marks the anniversary of the last Cascadia earthquake.</p> <p>State and local officials say it's a good reminder to make sure you're prepared for the next one.</p> <p>It's been 323 years since that megaquake hit the Oregon Coast on January 26th, 1700.</p> <p>It had an estimated magnitude of 8.7 to 9.2.</p> |

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| | <p>Officials say the severe shaking caused the land to drop by about 6 feet.</p> <p>A tsunami arrived ashore about 15-to-25 minutes later.</p> <p>While experts can't predict when the next "big one" will occur, they agree the region is overdue for another catastrophic earthquake and tsunami.</p> <p>Officials encourage everyone to mark tomorrow's anniversary by creating a disaster plan and making sure you're prepared for an emergency.</p> <p>In September, KATU spoke with an expert on what you need to have to be prepared for an emergency. Ready.gov is a great resource to help you begin to prepare.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 UK workers struggle to feed children |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/25/world/europe/uk-cost-of-living-children.html |
| GIST | <p>When her two sons ask for snacks she can no longer afford, Aislinn Corey, a preschool teacher in London, lays down a blanket on the floor and plays “the picnic game.” She takes an orange or an apple collected from her preschool’s food bank and slices it in thirds to be shared.</p> <p>“We do it as an activity,” she said. “So they don’t know that mummy is struggling.”</p> <p>She says dinners are often reduced to “pasta pasta pasta,” and she sometimes skips the meal entirely so there is more food for her children.</p> <p>As the cost of grocery shopping and heating homes have hit records in recent months, the signs of distress are everywhere. The BBC has published dozens of online recipes costing less than a pound, or about \$1.23, per portion. Some schools have turned down their heaters. And many communities have opened “warm spaces” — heated public rooms for people with cold homes.</p> <p>But in Britain, one of the world’s richest countries, among the most shocking signs of the cost-of-living crisis is that a growing number of workers are struggling to feed their children.</p> <p>Some are heading to food banks for the first time.</p> <p>“It’s atrocious that it’s working people who are coming to us,” said Vicky Longbone, a church minister who runs a food bank in Derby, in central England.</p> <p>For the hardest hit working families, the crisis has been long in the making.</p> <p>Employment growth has left Britain with fewer out-of-work households, but many of those who found work still did not reach a decent standard of living, which left them vulnerable when inflation hit a 41-year high a few months ago, and wages failed to keep up.</p> <p>Austerity measures under a decade of Conservative-led governments have also eaten away at the benefits paid to many low-income families, including working households. Since 2016, Britain has had one of the highest minimum wages in the world for most workers, benefiting some of the lowest earners. But many of them still cannot find enough hours of work, and the income of low earners has grown more slowly in Britain than in some other Western countries including Germany and France.</p> <p>“It is harder because the past 10 years have been so awful,” said Greg Thwaites, an economist at the Resolution Foundation, an independent research institute focused on living standards.</p> |

Then, in October, consumer prices surged 11.1 percent from a year earlier. With energy and food costs driving the inflation, lower-income families, who spend a larger share of their income on essentials, were disproportionately hit. The rises slowed slightly in December, but consumer prices were still up more than 10 percent compared with a year earlier.

Although some key statistics are not yet available, including the latest annual figure for child poverty, there are clear signs that many workers, including working parents, are under serious strain, as well as growing evidence that children are going hungry at home.

While the proportion of working families relying on food banks remains very small, they are now a noticeable slice of food-bank users. The Trussell Trust, which operates food pantries across the country and recorded more than 300,000 new users in the first half of last year, [said that](#) a fifth of its clients in mid-2022 came from households with someone in work.

In London, the Hackney Food Bank provided meals for 647 children in December, up from 330 a year earlier. Some [schools have started](#) providing free meals for every student, not just those who [qualify for them through the welfare system](#), and a headmaster in a deprived area of the city said that more children and their parents had started relying for their breakfast on the free toast the school gives out at the front gate.

The Felix Project, which provides surplus food to organizations across London, said that half of the 183 charities it supports had recently reported full-time public sector workers using their services for the first time.

“You see ambulance crew, teachers going to the food bank,” Kingsley Fredrick, who works for a food bank in east London, said at the end of another busy shift. “What does it say about a community, about a country?”

Low-income Londoners were the worst affected by the cost-of-living crisis, according to an [analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#), a British research institute, with added pressure from ever-higher rents. But the crisis has struck far beyond the capital, with Scotland and the north of England also hard-hit.

On a recent night, Alicia Marcano, 46, a nurse, headed for the first time into a food bank in the east London neighborhood of Hackney. She listened carefully to volunteers’ instructions, then, with her eyes downcast, started packing up cans of beans, biscuits and pasta. “This is new ground for me,” she said.

In recent months, she had saved money by packing lunches of hot dogs and burgers for her 12-year-old daughter instead of paying for a school meal.

“I wouldn’t normally give her anything like that,” she said. “But it’s cheap.”

Some lawmakers in the governing Conservative Party have argued that demand for food banks is not a reflection of real need. One, Lee Anderson, said that the real “challenge” was that food-bank users “cannot cook properly, they cannot cook a meal from scratch, they cannot budget.”

A spokesman for the Department for Work and Pensions said that the government recognized that families were struggling, and that it had recently dedicated billions of pounds to helping people pay their bills during the cost-of-living crisis.

The Resolution Foundation [said in a recent report](#) that government had rightly prioritized lower-income families in these measures. But a YouGov survey commissioned for the report found that 11 percent of people said that they had been hungry but not eaten because of a lack of money in the past month. Before the pandemic, that figure was 5 per cent.

The government also notes that child poverty dropped during the peak pandemic years, but experts said the decline was probably linked to [pandemic-related government benefits that have ended](#).

Christalla Jamil, the chief executive of a group of 10 schools in some of London's most deprived areas, said she saw the effects of the cost-of-living crisis every day. Some children have started bringing only a bag of cookies for lunch, she said — and their parents got those from the schools' food banks. Even some teaching assistants have started visiting the food bank.

"This is heartbreaking," she said. "And it's more heartbreaking because it's all of our people."

Chefs in Schools, a charity that focuses on school meals, said teachers had reported that children were stealing food from classmates to take home and hiding in the playground when they had brought nothing for lunch.

"We are one of the wealthiest nations on earth," said Naomi Duncan, the charity's chief executive. "We can do better for our children."

More than a third of children in England get free school meals, the government said, as can all children in the first three years of English schooling. But charities argue that many older children from low-income families do not meet the threshold to apply because their parents earn more than the cutoff point for the aid, which for many is £7,400 a year.

For some children, school meals have recently turned into the only reliable, nutritious meal of the day, teachers and charities say.

Sharon Grant, a part-time cashier at an Asda supermarket in London, said the cost of energy recently had often left her with little or no money for food. Like many low-income people, she has to pay for her heat and electricity up front, feeding money into a prepayment meter in her flat. In the winter cold, she said, £50 in the meter can last only a couple of days.

Some days, she resorts to feeding her 15-year-old twin sons and 11-year-old daughter cereal for dinner. On the worst nights, she has nothing to give them, and she has noticed they have started to struggle with their schoolwork.

"They are not as bright as they used to be," she said. "They are hungry."

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Crowd rallies at Capitol: 'stop the airport' |
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| SOURCE | https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article271535732.html |
| GIST | <p>Roughly 100 anti-airport activists rallied Wednesday on the north steps of the Legislative Building in Olympia, urging state lawmakers to stop seeking a site to build a new commercial airport in Washington.</p> <p>The prospect that either of three rural areas in Pierce and Thurston County could be home to a two-runway airport has spurred fierce opposition from residents, as they confront fears of losing their homes and sound the alarm about threats to public safety, wildlife and the environment.</p> <p>In an hour-long morning demonstration, they used what they said was their strongest weapon: Their voices.</p> <p>Scott Lay, an organizer with the Coalition Against Graham and Eatonville-Roy Airports, provided additional encouragement.</p> <p>"What do we want?" Lay asked.</p> <p>"Stop the airport!" the crowd answered.</p> |

Most brought signs to the state Capitol. They called for repelling urban sprawl; protecting water, wildlife and homes; investing in high-speed rail as an alternative to aviation; and abolishing the Commercial Aviation Coordinating Commission, the state-created planning group tasked with identifying a feasible site for a new two-runway airport.

“Keep Rural Pierce County Evergreen!” one sign said.

In 2019, the CACC was directed by the state Legislature to research potential landing spots for Washington’s next major airport amid projections that Seattle-Tacoma International Airport will reach capacity by 2032, leaving 27 million annual passengers unable to fly by 2050.

When the commission in September narrowed its site review to two so-called greenfield locations in Pierce County and another one in Thurston County, it set off a wave of local pushback that has been organized and persistent.

“You are the reason why we have made any headway,” said Dawn Sonntag, chief organizer of Stop the Thurston Airport, one of several speakers who addressed those gathered at the Capitol on a workday.

The airport site exploration has galvanized communities in and around Graham, Roy and East Olympia. Organizers said that they must remain vigilant and stay the course, anticipating that the fight could be lengthy even if they claim near-term victories.

Rep. Tom Dent, R-Moses Lake, said that he hoped this week to introduce legislation to reset or end the CACC’s search, which has been ongoing for three years. Dent is among several state and local lawmakers who have declared their opposition to the prospect of putting an airport in Pierce or Thurston county.

“These three sites are not going to happen,” he told demonstrators.

Dent and other lawmakers have said the CACC’s process — launched by a unanimously approved bill in 2019 — has been flawed and lacked needed public engagement. At least some people opposed to siting an airport in the South Puget Sound have signaled they do not seek site selection improvements, but instead want any airport plans permanently shelved to end the stress of the unknown.

“People have the right to live with peace of mind and know that their homes are safe,” Lay said.

Orting Mayor Josh Penner warned activists to not let their guards down.

“We have folks on the ropes,” he said.

The rally attracted residents from Thurston, Pierce and King counties at the start of Lobby Day, where people meet with legislators to advocate for specific causes. Some rally attendees said they had meetings set up later in the day.

Penner urged activists to seek commitments from lawmakers, noting that it was more valuable than any words of protest.

“Runways don’t care about rhetoric. All of the stuff that we do talking out here doesn’t matter,” he said. “What matters is the relationships that you build in that building.”

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Bivalent booster effective against XBB.1.5? |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2023/01/25/covid-bivalent-booster-xbb15-infections/ |
| GIST | Coronavirus boosters are sparking confusion and questions again as the United States confronts the growth of a new variant adept at evading immunity, while federal officials consider switching to an annual shot model. |

The XBB.1.5 variant is a highly transmissible descendant of omicron that is now estimated to cause about half of new infections in the country. Early lab studies showed that it was especially effective at evading virus-fighting antibodies, prompting concerns that it might more readily slip past the updated boosters.

But a new study released Wednesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers reassurance that the updated booster shots, which rolled out in the fall, are still protecting people in the real world.

The new booster shots are bivalent, meaning they are designed to protect against both the original strain and the BA.5 omicron subvariant that caused most infections over the summer. The latest data shows that the booster protects people from getting sick with XBB.1.5 about as well as it did against BA.5.

The CDC data arrived around the same time that the Food and Drug Administration is considering switching the country's vaccine strategy to mimic the one used for the flu, with people getting annual shots targeting whichever strain is predicted to dominate during the fall and winter.

Amid a swirl of new information, The Washington Post received hundreds of questions about booster shots for a recent reader live chat with health reporters and CDC Director Rochelle Walensky. Here's what we know and don't know about boosters.

How effective is the bivalent booster against XBB.1.5 infections?

CDC analysts used real-world data gathered from a national testing program available at pharmacies to see how well the updated vaccine protected people who had received the shot up to three months earlier compared with people who had been previously vaccinated but hadn't received a bivalent booster.

Based on data collected from Dec. 1 to Jan. 13, researchers found that the updated boosters cut the risk of symptomatic infection by about half for most adults, and by more than one-third for people 65 and older. Symptomatic infection was defined as having one or more of the common symptoms of COVID-19, such as cough or fever.

"Bottom line: We did not see reduced vaccine protection against symptomatic illness for XBB/XBB.1.5 compared with recent BA.5-related variants, which is reassuring," said Brendan Jackson, who heads CDC's coronavirus response, during a briefing Wednesday. "This was true regardless of which boosters people had received, but people who received the updated, or bivalent, coronavirus vaccines had higher levels of protection than those who received only the previous vaccines."

Earlier lab studies had raised concerns, because the bivalent vaccine produced lower levels of virus-fighting antibodies against the XBB-related subvariants. But that does not seem to be the case with the latest real-world data, CDC officials and experts said.

"It doesn't provide perfect protection, but it does reduce the risk of becoming ill by roughly 45 percent if you already received two or more doses of the vaccine," Albert Ko, an epidemiologist and infectious-disease physician at Yale University, said in an email.

How effective is the bivalent booster against severe outcomes from XBB.1.5?

Officials said there isn't enough data yet to know how well the updated boosters protect against more severe disease, hospitalization and death. But they expect that the updated boosters will provide higher protection against these outcomes.

"What we know from past experience is generally that the vaccines protect better against more severe disease," said the CDC's Ruth Link-Gelles, who leads the agency's team on coronavirus vaccine effectiveness.

She added that the latest study did not take into account previous coronavirus infections, which also provide some protection. People who have previously had COVID-19 start from a slightly more protected place than those without prior vaccination or infection, Link-Gelles said. “So, if anything, these estimates that we’re publishing are probably an underestimate” of the vaccine’s protection.

Data released in December shows that adults who received the updated boosters cut their risk of having to visit an emergency room or being hospitalized with COVID-19 by 50 percent or more at a time when the BA.5 variant was still dominant. The boosters provided even higher protection — 70 to 80 percent — for those 65 and older.

If XBB.1.5. evades antibodies, does that mean I have no immunity?

This is a really important question, and the good news is that, as long as you’ve been vaccinated or have had a previous infection, you still have immunity.

Even though XBB.1.5 and other omicron subvariants can slip past the initial defenses and infect you, your body is still trained to keep fighting the coronavirus from previous vaccination and infection. It’s like invaders breaking through to the castle gate, only to be defeated by soldiers in the courtyard.

Fighting severe outcomes from an infection involves more than just antibodies. Some of the worst health effects of COVID-19 in the dark early days of the pandemic were from the immune system overreacting to an unfamiliar virus.

“You can see in someone’s blood that their antibodies have waned, but they still have protection against serious disease,” Link-Gelles said. Other parts of the immune system response are “many orders of magnitude harder to study, so that’s why we often rely on antibodies as kind of our first understanding.”

When can I get my next booster?

If you are up-to-date on your shots, you would not qualify for another booster until the fall under the new strategy proposed by the FDA. But the agency also said medically vulnerable people, including older people and those who are immunocompromised, may need two shots a year. It’s unclear when they would qualify for a second bivalent shot as regulators weigh different approaches, such as two shots in the fall given one month apart.

Post reporter Laurie McGinley writes that the latest proposal would entail determining “in the spring which strain will pose the greatest threat the following winter. A vaccine targeting that strain would then be administered in the fall, in the hopes that a streamlined effort would encourage vaccine uptake.”

The plan drew mixed reactions and will be the subject of a Thursday meeting of FDA advisers.

How long does bivalent booster protection last?

We don’t yet know. Since booster campaigns started, research has shown that boosters offer short-lived protection against infection and longer-term protection against severe outcomes.

The newly released CDC data covers only three months so far, and it will take even longer to determine how protective boosters are against people falling severely ill with XBB.1.5. Link-Gelles said officials are still examining the question, and she cautioned that people who were infected last spring or summer but who have not gotten a bivalent booster probably “don’t have a lot of protection left over from that previous infection.”

Experts recognize that this can be frustrating for high-risk people trying to account for the risk of the coronavirus while making plans for the year, such as booking international summer vacations.

“We should learn in the next several months how long the booster provides protection and what the FDA and CDC recommend,” Ko said. “If you are significantly concerned about your risk about getting COVID-19, you may want to wait before making plans.”

Should I worry if my last shot was months ago?

Given that protection against infections is short-lived, scores of Post readers who fall into high-risk groups asked during the live chat whether they should be worried that their protection has worn off.

While we await data on the effectiveness of bivalent boosters against severe illness and hospitalization for XBB.1.5, experts note that they have yet to see evidence of this variant causing more severe illness. Hospitals in the Northeast, where that variant became dominant in December, have not been raising alarms about patients coming in sicker, which happened in areas where the delta variant surged in 2021.

Eric Topol, a professor of molecular medicine at Scripps Research who has championed the bivalent booster, said it's too early to say whether a second shot is necessary, especially for those who had previously been infected and received shots. He is skeptical of an annual shot model for older people and other high-risk individuals and said they need better guidance from the federal government.

"The chance of getting COVID throughout the year is unlike the flu," Topol said. "The chance of having full protection for a year isn't backed up by data. The best data we have is four to six months."

Should I get boosted again each time infections spike?

Sometimes it can feel as if vaccines are pointless in avoiding infections when you are hearing about vaccinated friends and loved ones getting infected. But the goal of the U.S. vaccine strategy for COVID-19 has been to reduce severe outcomes, not infections, and the latest CDC data is a reminder that vaccines still offer some protection against mild infections. Although boosters can temporarily shore up protection against infection, data suggests that they have less of a benefit when the last shot was recent.

In short, it's not realistic to constantly get a booster every time coronavirus cases are rising to avoid getting sick. That's when you'll have to tap the other tools available for avoiding infections, such as wearing high-quality masks, testing before gatherings and avoiding crowded indoor settings during periods of heightened transmission.

Paul Offit, a vaccine adviser to the FDA and pediatrics professor at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, said people who are very old should recognize that, even with boosters, they may struggle to mount a strong immune response to the coronavirus. He said they should consider heightened precautions to avoid infections during waves and prioritize early antiviral treatment if they do get sick.

"We keep talking about boosting and boosting and boosting," said Offit, who has been critical of frequently boosting the general population. "But antivirals save people's lives."

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Seattle sues Kia, Hyundai for car thefts rise |
| SOURCE | https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattle-lawsuit-kia-hyundai/281-293d9e1b-bada-49bd-bebf-ad7f31ede361 |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE — Seattle City Attorney Ann Davison filed a lawsuit Monday in federal court against car manufacturers Kia and Hyundai, alleging their failures to install anti-theft technology in some vehicles contributed to an exponential rise in thefts.</p> <p>A city release states that from 2021 to 2022, thefts of Kia and Hyundai cars increased by 363% and 503%, respectively. The lawsuit alleges that Kia and Hyundai knew of the public safety concerns from the spike in thefts of their vehicles and that neither company took meaningful steps to address the problem.</p> <p>"Kia and Hyundai chose to cut corners and cut costs at the expense of their customers and the public. As a result, our police force has had to tackle a huge rise in vehicle theft and related problems with already stretched resources. Now Seattle taxpayers must shoulder the burden of the increase in theft," said Davison. "Kia and Hyundai need to take responsibility for the public safety hazard that they created."</p> |

An [insurance industry group said in September](#) that these cars are stolen at nearly twice the rate of the rest of the auto industry because their keys lack computer chips for theft “immobilizer” systems. Instructional videos from social media are believed to have helped spread knowledge of this information.

The Highway Loss Data Institute, a unit of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, found that Hyundais and Kias without immobilizers had a vehicle theft claim rate of 2.18 per 1,000 insured vehicle years. The rest of the industry combined had a rate of 1.21. An insured vehicle year is equal to one vehicle insured for one year.

The institute, [which issued its findings on Thursday](#), compared vehicles from the 2015 through 2019 model years. It studied vehicle theft claims from 2021.

“Now that people know how easy it is to steal Hyundais and Kias, the Seattle Police Department has noticed a huge increase in the theft of these models,” Chief Adrian Z. Diaz said in a statement “from 48 reported thefts of Hyundais and Kias in August to 197 in December. Sixty-four percent of those vehicles were later recovered within city limits, which shows they’re most likely being taken for short periods of time, often in order to commit other crimes. To protect the hard-earned property of Seattle residents, car makers need to take this problem seriously and do all they can to prevent these thefts.”

Drivers Phaedra Harmon and Mike Engelhart say they both had their vehicles stolen with the method described.

"Even the tools in my trunk they didn't take, they did carve Kia Boys into my hood and into the side of my car, they smashed my screen, they carved in the back of my seat, they took a knife to the roof of my car, it was tattered completely, it smelled weird, but it was intact, there was only one other scrape on the outside," Harmon said. "I'm really glad someone's doing something, and I hope that means that people who drive Hyundais and Kias can get their cars protected because now that people know how easy it is to steal them, who knows how long its gonna last."

Engelhart, too, said he hopes this will make a difference moving forward. He says when he called the theft he faced in, he learned how common the issue was.

"Even if they do find it you don't know what condition it's going to be in," Engelhart said. "The day mine got taken the officer said he was responding to fourteen."

Both Hyundai and Kia shared statements with KING 5 in response to Monday's lawsuit.

Hyundai: "Hyundai believes this lawsuit is improper and unnecessary. In response to increasing thefts targeting our vehicles without push-button ignitions and immobilizing anti-theft devices in the United States, Hyundai Motor America has made engine immobilizers standard on all vehicles produced as of November 2021. Additionally, Hyundai has taken a series of actions to deter thefts of affected vehicles, including an upcoming software update scheduled to be available beginning next month and provided at no cost to customers.

Hyundai is also providing free steering wheel locks, as available, to select law enforcement agencies across the country, including in the Seattle area, for distribution to local residents who own or lease affected models. Owners may also bring their vehicles to a local Hyundai dealer for the purchase and installation of a customized security kit. We apologize for the inconvenience to affected customers."

Kia: "Kia remains concerned that criminal actors are targeting certain Kia cars with a steel key and “turn-to-start” ignition systems. While no car can be made completely theft-proof, Kia continues to make steering wheel locks available to customers through interested local law enforcement agencies, subject to available supply, at no cost to concerned owners of these vehicles.

Kia also continues its efforts to develop additional solutions for vehicles not originally equipped with an immobilizer, including the development and testing of enhanced security software designed to restrict

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| | operation of the vehicle's ignition system. Kia has started notifying owners of certain models of the availability of this software upgrade at no cost, and Kia anticipates that it will make software upgrades available for most affected vehicles over the next few months." |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Record number homeless deaths King Co. |
| SOURCE | https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/homeless/awareness-homeless-deaths-king-county/281-dd909ab9-d267-49f6-bee7-8e5d9a2dfcfc |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE — There were 310 homeless deaths in King County in 2022. Already, the new year is off to a tragic start.</p> <p>On Tuesday night in the 1900 block of 22nd Avenue South, gun violence close to an encampment left a 29-year-old man dead. Homicide detectives determined a 54-year-old man, who was injured by gunfire, is a potential suspect, according to Seattle police.</p> <p>Last week, two men were shot and killed near an encampment in Seattle's Georgetown neighborhood. No arrests have been made in connection with that incident.</p> <p>According to the City of Seattle, between January and September of 2022, public safety incidents with a connection to homelessness included 101 incidents of shots fired or shootings, 1,225 fires, and 9,063 emergency medical response calls.</p> <p>On Wednesday, in front of Seattle City Hall, Pat Simpson was determined to catch people's attention and raise awareness.</p> <p>"Dumi died outside in Ballard. Would you remember him," Simpson asked a passersby. "We are remembering him today."</p> <p>"People deserve to be remembered by name," she added.</p> <p>Simpson is part of Women in Black, a group that works to bring attention to homeless deaths.</p> <p>"We are here to remember Dumi Longwe, who died recently while homeless," said Anitra Freeman, adding that the 29-year-old died of a drug overdose more than two weeks ago.</p> <p>City Hall was the chosen venue for an afternoon vigil. Simpson said it is where the group often gathers "every time we learn a person who is homeless has been found outdoors or in a public place or has died by violence."</p> <p>Freeman calls last year's record-breaking number of homeless deaths heartbreaking.</p> <p>"Unless things change drastically, this year is going to be worse," she said. "The community is being fractured by homelessness, by sweeps, by death."</p> <p>Women in Black say resources like social housing and treatment centers are necessary.</p> <p>"We can't expect any quick change until we really as a community address the underlying issue which is that people cannot find safe and dignified housing that they can afford," said Simpson.</p> <p>According to the city of Seattle, in the first nine months of 2022, 1,300 referrals to shelter were made.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Seattle courts resume ticket late fees |
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| SOURCE | https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-courts-resume-late-fees-unpaid-parking-camera-traffic-tickets/7THAPI7VOZGHNP553UGHNYKA/ |
| GIST | <p>Beginning Jan. 30, Seattle courts will resume late fees on infraction tickets that are past their due date, ending the suspension of late fees that began during the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.</p> <p>According to a media release, about 350,000 tickets will be impacted if they remain unpaid.</p> <p>To avoid late fees, the city suggests paying your tickets, considering community service plan options or scheduling a hearing to dispute or possibly lower the tickets.</p> <p>In March 2020, default penalty fees for past-due tickets and referring tickets to collections were halted due to economic hardships caused by the pandemic.</p> <p>Late fees are an additional \$25 for parking and camera tickets, and an additional \$52 for traffic tickets. If you lost your ticket(s), the city's online portal can check your license plate, and any issued tickets with that vehicle will be listed.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Spokane police VR headsets for training |
| SOURCE | https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/spokane-police-among-first-agencies-use-vr-headsets-officer-training/HG5EFC6DZFB2XL2CUGIDANDTWY/ |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE — The Spokane Police Department is one of the first 100 agencies in the nation to use virtual reality headsets to prepare officers for situations they may face on the street.</p> <p>The technology offers a variety of scenarios for officers to react to. In some cases, they have to find ways to de-escalate volatile situations or decide when the use of force is needed.</p> <p>Some scenarios give officers choices on how they want to proceed.</p> <p>“We also use (the technology) for use of force where it’s a scenario where somebody may be coming at the officer with an edged weapon or an object that could hurt them, and they may have to use Tasers or a less lethal tool to end that scenario,” Spokane Police Department Lt. Steve Wohl said in a video about the VR training.</p> <p>Wohl said the department is always looking for ways to give its officers better training.</p> <p>“We put officers through scenarios where they’re actually witnessing and living what someone with schizophrenia is feeling, so they’re hearing the thoughts and mental processes that someone in crisis is dealing with. It’s more realistic than trying to watch a TV and react to that. So, you’re actually viewing and are in that situation as it unfolds,” said Wohl.</p> <p>After the officer completes a scenario, they are debriefed about what worked well, what could be improved and issues that may have come up during the session, KXLY reported.</p> <p>Axon, the company that provides the technology, was training some Spokane officers last week. That training will then be passed on to all officers in the department starting in early February, according to KXLY.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Malawi cholera outbreak death toll rises |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/malawi-cholera-outbreak-death-toll-rises-1000-96662863 |
| GIST | BLANTYRE, Malawi -- Malawi’s cholera outbreak has claimed more than 1,000 lives, according to the country’s health minister, who warned that some cultural beliefs and hostility toward health workers were slowing efforts to curb infections. |

Cholera had killed 1,002 people as of Tuesday, while 1,115 people were hospitalized from the outbreak that started in March 2022, Minister of Health Khumbize Kandodo Chiponda said. It's the country's worst outbreak of the waterborne illness in two decades.

The country of 20 million people recorded 12 deaths from 626 new cases in 24 hours, she said.

Frustration and suspicion over the rising cases resulted in weekend violence. Angry villagers beat up health workers and damaged a facility at the Nandumbo Health Centre in the Southern Region's Balaka district.

Residents accused health workers of denying them an opportunity to conduct dignified burials. They forced some health workers to vacate the facility, stoned a cholera isolation ward and forced the discharge of 22 cholera patients.

Esnath Suwedi, vice-chairperson of the Nandumbo area's development committee, a traditional local authority, said people thought the health workers were acting "mysteriously."

Suwedi said residents alleged the workers were using contaminated syringes to inject people. The Balaka district is one of the worst affected areas, recording 46 deaths from 1,450 cases in the outbreak.

Cultural burial rites are also becoming a source of contention, Chiponda, the health minister, said during a daily briefing Tuesday.

"For example, people who are dying of or who have died from cholera may be washed by family members, who then prepare funeral feasts for family and friends held very soon after death. Outbreaks of cholera commonly follow these feasts," the minister said.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 UN: fall in global economic growth |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/forecasts-fall-global-economic-growth-19-2023-96665013 |
| GIST | <p>UNITED NATIONS -- The United Nations forecast Wednesday that global economic growth will fall significantly to 1.9% this year as a result of the food and energy crisis sparked by the war in Ukraine, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, persistently high inflation and the climate emergency.</p> <p>Painting a gloomy and uncertain economic outlook, the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs said the current global economic slowdown "cuts across both developed and developing countries, with many facing risks of recession in 2023."</p> <p>"A broad-based and severe slowdown of the global economy looms large amid high inflation, aggressive monetary tightening, and heightened uncertainties," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a foreword to the 178-page report.</p> <p>The report said this year's 1.9% economic growth forecast — down from an estimated 3% in 2022 — is one of the lowest growth rates in recent decades. But it projects a moderate pick-up to 2.7% in 2024 if inflation gradually abates and economic headwinds start to subside.</p> <p>In its annual report earlier this month, the World Bank which lends money to poorer countries for development projects, cut its growth forecast nearly in half, from its previous projection of 3% to just 1.7%.</p> <p>The International Monetary Fund, which provides loans to needy countries, projected in October that global growth would slow from 6% in 2021 to 3.2% in 2022 and 2.7% in 2023. IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said at last week's World Economic Forum in Davos that 2023 will be a difficult year, but stuck by the projection and said "we don't expect a global recession."</p> |

Shantanu Mukherjee, director of the economic analysis and policy division of the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, highlighted the growing income inequality in the world at a news conference launching the report.

Between 2019 and 2021, he said, average incomes for the top 10% rose by 1.2% while the incomes of the lowest 40% fell by 0.5%.

“The top 10% now earns on average over 42 times what the lowest percentiles” earn, Mukherjee said.

According to the U.N. report, this year “growth momentum has weakened in the United States, the European Union and other developed economies, adversely affecting the rest of the world economy.”

In the United States, GDP is projected to expand by only 0.4% in 2023 after estimated growth of 1.8% in 2022, the U.N. said. And many European countries are projected to experience “a mild recession” with the war in Ukraine heading into its second year on Feb. 14, high energy costs, and inflation and tighter financial conditions depressing household consumption and investment.

The economies in the 27-nation European Union are forecast to grow by just 0.2% in 2023, down from an estimated 3.3% in 2022, the U.N. said. And in the United Kingdom, which left the EU three years ago, GDP is projected to contract by 0.8% in 2023, continuing a recession that began in the second half of 2022, it said.

With China’s government abandoning its zero-COVID policy late last year and easing monetary and fiscal policies, the U.N. forecast that its economy, which expanded by only 3% in 2022, will accelerate to 4.8% this year.

“But the reopening of the economy is expected to be bumpy,” the U.N. said. “Growth will likely remain well below the pre-pandemic rate of 6-6.5%.”

The U.N. report said Japan’s economy is expected to be among the better-performing among developed countries this year, with GDP forecast to increase by 1.5%, slightly lower than last year’s estimated growth of 1.6%.

Across east Asia, the U.N. said economic recovery remains fragile though GDP growth in 2023 is forecast to reach 4.4%, up from 3.2% last year, and stronger than in other regions.

In South Asia, the U.N. forecast average GDP growth will slow from 5.6% last year to 4.8% this year as a result of high food and energy prices, “monetary tightening and fiscal vulnerabilities.”

But growth in India, which is expected to overtake China this year as the world’s most populous nation, is expected to remain strong at 5.8%, slightly lower than the estimated 6.4% in 2022, “as higher interest rates and a global slowdown weigh on investments and exports,” the U.N. report said.

In Western Asia, oil-producing countries are benefiting from high prices and rising output as well as a revival in tourism, the U.N. said. But economies that aren’t oil producers remain weak “given tightening access to international finance and severe fiscal constraints,” and average growth in the region is projected to slow from an estimated 6.4% in 2022 to 3.5% this year.

The U.N. said Africa has been hit “by multiple shocks, including weaker demand from key trading partners (especially China and Europe), a sharp increase in energy and food prices, rapidly rising borrowing costs and adverse weather events.”

One result, it said, is mounting debt-servicing burdens which have forced a growing number of African governments to seek bilateral and multilateral support.

The U.N. projected economic growth in Africa to slow from an estimated 4.1% in 2022 to 3.8% this year.

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| | <p>In Latin America and the Caribbean, the U.N. said the outlook “remains challenging,” citing labor market prospects, stubbornly high inflation and other issues. It forecast that regional growth will slow to just 1.4% in 2023 from an estimated expansion of 3.8% in 2022.</p> <p>“The region’s largest economies – Argentina, Brazil and Mexico – are expected to grow at very low rates due to tightening financial conditions, weakening exports, and domestic vulnerabilities,” the U.N. said.</p> <p>For the world’s least developed countries, the U.N. said growth is projected at 4.4% this year, about the same as last year but significantly below the UN's target of 7% by 2030.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Ethnic clashes in Ethiopia kill dozens |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/witnesses-latest-ethnic-clashes-ethiopia-kill-dozens-96682661 |
| GIST | <p>NAIROBI, Kenya -- Witnesses allege that several dozen civilians and fighters have been killed in the latest clashes between Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups in central Ethiopia.</p> <p>The fighting erupted Saturday in Jewuha town in the Amhara region. One witness, like others speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation, told The Associated Press that fighters thought to be with the rebel Oromo Liberation Army attacked a camp used by Amhara special forces and killed more than 20 of them. The witness said they helped to bury three civilians as well.</p> <p>Fighting has spread to other towns, the witness said. Another witness in Jewuha involved in burials said “several dozen” bodies had been collected.</p> <p>A witness in Ataye town in the Amhara region alleged that clashes between OLA and Amhara special forces were ongoing and thousands of civilians were fleeing. A doctor at Shewa Robit hospital told the AP it had received the bodies of “several people” since Monday as well as some victims with serious injuries.</p> <p>The Amhara regional government on Wednesday confirmed the clashes and said members of the federal army, federal police and Amhara regional forces were working to bring the situation under control.</p> <p>A federal police spokesman didn’t respond to calls. An Ethiopian government spokesman, Legesse Tulu, hung up.</p> <p>Some Amharas and Oromos, two of Ethiopia’s largest ethnic groups, are in a bitter rivalry over new and old grievances. Amharas have been targeted in several locations across the neighboring Oromia region, prompting Amhara militias to deploy.</p> <p>Oromos also have alleged being targeted in deadly attacks by Amharas. The Oromo Legacy Leadership and Advocacy Association in a statement this week said that “under international law, the Ethiopian federal government has a duty to protect its citizens.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Outrage: Memphis cops beat man to death |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/tyre-nichols-died-extensive-bleeding-caused-severe-beating/story?id=96644076 |
| GIST | <p>Tyre Nichols, the Black man whose death this month at the hands of five Memphis, Tennessee, police officers has triggered national outrage, suffered from "extensive bleeding caused by a severe beating," according to a preliminary independent autopsy commissioned by the family.</p> <p>"His observed injuries are consistent with what the family and attorneys witnessed on the video of his fatal encounter with police on January 7," the family of Tyre Nichols and their attorneys, Ben Crump and Antonio Romanucci, said in a statement. "Further details and findings from this independent report will be disclosed at another time."</p> |

The autopsy was released by the family's attorneys who hired their own "highly regarded, nationally renowned forensic pathologist" to complete the report. The independent autopsy has not been released publicly.

Body camera footage of the incident has yet to be released, but Crump described the video as "appalling," "deplorable," "heinous," "violent" and "troublesome on every level" during a press conference Monday.

The family is cooperating with an ongoing investigation by the Department of Justice. Police said the bodycam video will be released within the next two weeks.

"Whatever it takes to clear my son's name and to get justice for my son," Rodney Wells told ABC News. "If they need to keep the video for two more weeks, then let them keep the video for two more weeks."

The Memphis Police Department announced on Friday that it [fired the five police officers](#), all Black, involved in the incident, concluding the department's internal investigation.

The officers were identified as Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Emmitt Martin III, Desmond Mills Jr. and Justin Smith.

The former police officers and the police union did not immediately respond to ABC News' requests for comment.

Memphis Chief of Police Cerelyn Davis said that other Memphis police officers are still under investigation for Memphis Police Department policy violations in a video posted Wednesday evening.

After viewing the bodycam video, Davis called the officers' actions "heinous, reckless, and inhumane," adding that "when the video is released in the coming days, you will see this for yourselves."

Chief Davis said that she expects those to protest following the video's release, but warns that even though she anticipates outrage, that "none of this is a calling card for inciting violence."

Nichols' family said he was kicked, pepper-sprayed and shocked with a stun gun, all while Nichols repeatedly asked, "What did I do?"

"Once the video started and I heard my son's voice, I lost it. I couldn't stay in the room. All I heard him say was, 'What did I do?' And once I heard that, I lost it," Rowvaughn Wells, Nichols' mother, told ABC News on Monday.

Shelby County District Attorney Steve Mulroy told ABC News his office is looking into possible criminal charges against the former officers. The family said it is hoping for murder charges.

Nichols was stopped by police on Jan. 7 for alleged reckless driving and was hospitalized in critical condition after complaining of shortness of breath during the arrest. Three days later, Nichols died.

"They handcuffed him and set him, propped him up on the car. And as he fell over they'd tell him 'sit back up,'" Rodney told ABC News. "You know, and he would slump back over again and they would make him sit back up. They never rendered any aid."

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 NCSC: Russia, Iran in espionage campaigns |
| SOURCE | https://therecord.media/british-cyber-agency-issues-warning-over-russian-and-iranian-espionage-campaigns/ |

Two separate but similar espionage campaigns from Russian and Iranian-linked groups have prompted a warning from Britain's National Cyber Security Centre.

In a document published on Thursday local time the NCSC warned how instead of sending surprise phishing emails, the hacking groups – identified as “Russia-based” SEABORGIUM and “Iran-based” APT42, or Charming Kitten – are contacting their targets in a benign fashion and attempting to build a rapport and a sense of trust.

Only after this has been established do the groups attempt to dupe their victims into visiting a website which looks like the real sign-in page of a legitimate service, such as Gmail or Office 365, but is actually designed to harvest the target's log-in credentials.

Individuals working in “academia, defence, government organisations, NGOs, think-tanks, as well as politicians, journalists and activists,” are being targeted by the two groups. The attackers use “open-source resources to conduct reconnaissance, including social media and professional networking platforms” before reaching out.

“Having taken the time to research their targets' interests and contacts to create a believable approach,” the hackers start to build a rapport with their targets, often beginning “by establishing benign contact on a topic they hope will engage their targets,” NCSC said.

“Once trust is established, the attacker uses typical phishing tradecraft and shares a link, apparently to a document or website of interest. This leads the target to an actor-controlled server, prompting the target to enter account credentials.”

After these credentials are compromised, the groups “then use the stolen credentials to log in to targets' email accounts, from where they are known to access and steal emails and attachments from the victim's inbox. They have also set-up mail-forwarding rules, giving them ongoing visibility of victim correspondence.”

Although many cybersecurity researchers have labeled the entities as nation-state hacking groups, the NCSC has not formally attributed the campaigns to the governments of Iran and Russia. Typically the United Kingdom regards attribution to a state as a political declaration normally reserved for the Foreign Office.

Targeting by the Iran-based group

Charming Kitten has been described as state-sponsored by numerous specialist companies — including Google, Recorded Future and Proofpoint — on the basis of its apparent intelligence-gathering rather than financial motivation.

Last December, Human Rights Watch [said](#) that Charming Kitten was behind a well-resourced and ongoing international cyber espionage campaign that had aimed to compromise the accounts of a member of the organization's staff by having them enter their login credentials into a webpage that the hackers controlled.

After investigating the infrastructure being used to support the campaign, HRW discovered 44 phishing pages crafted to look like Microsoft, Google or Yahoo! login pages, displaying the email addresses of the targets who were human rights activists, journalists, diplomats and politicians working in the Middle East and North Africa.

The pages were designed to capture both the target's email password and any secondary authentication codes, although the phishing kit would not have been able to bypass a hardware-based authentication key using [the FIDO protocols](#).

Among the industry research linked to by the NCSC's advisory is [a publication by CERTFA](#) (the ‘Computer Emergency Response Team in Farsi’), a mostly anonymous collective that tracks Iranian cybercriminals and state-sponsored hackers targeting Iranian citizens around the world.

CERTFA's founder, Amin Sabeti, told The Record he knew of at least two cases of people in the U.K. being targeted by the Charming Kitten campaign. He explained how the espionage can pose various risks to these individuals, including even exposing their network of contacts inside Iran.

"If the individual works with them, the network will end up in prison in Iran or [the government will] use the material against the target to discredit them. For example, we have seen leaks of emails from prominent activists that the IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] has been trying to discredit in the public's eye," explained Sabeti.

Last year, the head of MI5, the U.K.'s domestically-focused security service which takes the lead on counter-terrorism and counter-espionage, [warned](#) that there had been at least 10 potential threats by Iran to "kidnap or even kill" British or U.K.-based people who were perceived as enemies of the regime.

It is not known what links, if any, these threats share with the Charming Kitten espionage campaign, but Sabeti told The Record he believed that Charming Kitten was linked to the IRGC and that he wouldn't be surprised to read a news story announcing that one of the campaign's targets had been killed.

"For example, imagine if the IRGC can convince someone to go to a country where the IRGC can run ops easily, such as Armenia, by impersonating someone and then inviting the target for a face-to-face meeting, workshops, speech, educational opportunity, etc," he said.

The IRGC has [claimed that it lured Ruhollah Zam](#), a dissident accused of inspiring protests in Iran and who had been living in exile in France, back to the country in 2019. Zam had reportedly visited a potential romantic interest in Iraq whom he had met online before the IRGC announced his capture. He was executed a year later.

Targeting by the Russia-based group

SEABORGIUM is [described](#) by Microsoft as "a threat actor that originates from Russia, with objectives and victimology that align closely with Russian state interests."

The group "primarily targets NATO countries, particularly the US and the UK" said researchers from Microsoft Threat Intelligence Center (MSTIC), and has a "high interest in targeting individuals" rather than corporations. Almost a third of the alerts which the company has sent out to potential victims were to people with consumer Microsoft email accounts.

As [reported](#) by Reuters, the group has also been linked to a website that published stolen private emails from several leading Brexit supporters, including the former chief of the Secret Intelligence Service, Sir Richard Dearlove, in an influence operation presenting the emails as evidence of a conspiracy.

It is not clear what interaction if any Dearlove had with the group before it accessed his ProtonMail account, however Microsoft's article on the group has revealed it has — similarly to Charming Kitten — created fake profiles on LinkedIn "for conducting reconnaissance of employees from specific organizations of interest."

"While the malicious campaigns use similar techniques and have similar targets, the campaigns are separate and the two actors are not collaborating," the NCSC's advisory stated.

In a statement published alongside the advisory, the NCSC's director of operations, Paul Chichester, said: "The UK is committed to exposing malicious cyber activity alongside our industry partners and this advisory raises awareness of the persistent threat posed by spear-phishing attacks.

"These campaigns by threat actors based in Russia and Iran continue to ruthlessly pursue their targets in an attempt to steal online credentials and compromise potentially sensitive systems. We strongly encourage organisations and individuals to remain vigilant to potential approaches and follow the mitigation advice in the advisory to protect themselves online."

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| HEADLINE | 01/26 Cybersecurity firms cut staff in past year |
| SOURCE | https://www.securityweek.com/tens-of-cybersecurity-companies-announced-layoffs-in-past-year/ |
| GIST | <p>Tens of cybersecurity companies have announced cutting staff over the past year as part of reorganization strategies, in many cases triggered by the global economic slowdown.</p> <p>One of the most recent announcements was made by Sophos, which in mid-January confirmed reports that it's laying off 10% of its global workforce. Roughly 450 people have reportedly lost their job as the company shifts focus to cybersecurity services, including managed detection and response.</p> <p>At around the same time, identity verification company Jumio also confirmed laying off roughly 100 people.</p> <p>In May 2022, cloud security company Lacework announced terminating 300 jobs, representing roughly 20% of its workforce.</p> <p>Another company that laid off a significant portion of its workforce last year is OneTrust, which provides privacy, security, and data governance technology. Nearly 1,000 employees were let go, roughly a quarter of the firm's workforce.</p> <p>IronNet, the cybersecurity firm founded by former NSA director Keith Alexander, fired 17% of staff in June and another 35% in September due to significant problems.</p> <p>In the fall, Cybereason announced plans to reduce its staff by 17%, just months after cutting 10% of its workforce. In total, the company fired approximately 300 employees.</p> <p>Cloud security firm Aqua Security has laid off 10% of its workforce, and Malwarebytes terminated 14% of its staff (around 125 people). Gen Digital, created through the merger of antivirus companies Avast and NortonLifeLock, let go of a quarter of employees, in some cases due to their activities overlapping with the other company's workers.</p> <p>In October, developer security company Snyk — recently valued at \$7.4 billion — announced that it had started restructuring and reducing its global workforce, impacting 198 employees, or 14% of its total workforce.</p> <p>The same month, security and application delivery solutions provider F5 announced cutting approximately 100 roles, representing 1% of its global workforce.</p> <p>Enterprise security solutions provider Forescout Technologies has reportedly laid off 100 of 170 employees at its R&D center in Israel, after firing 100 other employees in October.</p> <p>The companies that sacked employees cited market conditions, strategic reorganization and shifting priorities when motivating their decision.</p> <p>Data from Layoffs.fyi shows that tens of cybersecurity firms terminated staff over the past year. The list includes Tripwire, Deep Instinct, Pipl, Transmit Security, Tufin, Checkmarx, Varonis, Perimeter 81, and Armis.</p> <p>On the other hand, many of those who have been terminated may not have any difficulties securing a job at a different company.</p> <p>According to a study conducted by the nonprofit (ISC)², the global cybersecurity workforce is at an all-time high, with an estimated 4.7 million professionals. However, the study found that an additional 3.4 million cybersecurity workers are needed, with 70% of the 11,000 cybersecurity professionals who took</p> |

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| | part in a survey conducted by the nonprofit saying that their organization does not have enough cybersecurity employees. |
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| HEADLINE | 01/26 Chinese hackers adopt open source tool |
| SOURCE | https://www.securityweek.com/chinese-hackers-adopting-open-source-sparkrat-tool/ |
| GIST | <p>A Chinese threat actor tracked as DragonSpark has been using the SparkRAT open source remote administration tool (RAT) in recent attacks targeting East Asian organizations, cybersecurity firm SentinelOne reports.</p> <p>Relatively new, SparkRAT is a multi-platform RAT written in Golang that can run on Windows, Linux, and macOS systems, and which can update itself with new versions available through its command and control (C&C) server.</p> <p>The threat uses the WebSocket protocol to communicate with the C&C server and includes support for over 20 commands that allow it to execute tasks, control the infected machine, manipulate processes and files, and steal various types of information.</p> <p>The malware appears to be used by multiple adversaries but, according to SentinelOne, DragonSpark represents the first cluster of activity where SparkRAT has been constantly deployed in attacks.</p> <p>The attackers were also seen using the China Chopper webshell, along with other malware tools created by Chinese developers, including BadPotato, GotoHTTP, SharpToken, and XZB-1248, as well as two custom malware families, ShellCode_Loader and m6699.exe.</p> <p>The m6699.exe malware uses Golang source code interpretation to evade detection, where the Yaegi framework is used “to interpret at runtime encoded Golang source code stored within the compiled binary, executing the code as if compiled”, SentinelOne says.</p> <p>DragonSpark was seen targeting web servers and MySQL database servers for initial compromise and then performing lateral movement, escalating privileges, and deploying additional malware hosted on attacker-controlled infrastructure.</p> <p>The cybersecurity firm has observed DragonSpark abusing compromised infrastructure of legitimate organizations in Taiwan, including an art gallery, a baby products retailer, and games and gambling websites, for malware staging.</p> <p>DragonSpark also uses malware staging infrastructure in China, Hong Kong, and Singapore, while its C&C servers are located in Hong Kong and the US.</p> <p>Based on the infrastructure and tools, SentinelOne assesses that DragonSpark is a Chinese-speaking adversary, focused either on espionage or cybercrime – one of their C&C IPs was previously linked to the Zegost malware, an information stealer used by Chinese threat actors.</p> <p>“The threat actor behind DragonSpark used the China Chopper webshell to deploy malware. China Chopper has historically been consistently used by Chinese cybercriminals and espionage groups [...]. Further, all of the open source tools used by the threat actor conducting DragonSpark attacks are developed by Chinese-speaking developers,” SentinelOne notes.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 NKorea TA444 shows ‘startup’ culture |
| SOURCE | https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/north-korean-group-ta444-infection/ |
| GIST | A previously unknown, financially motivated North Korea state-sponsored threat actor has been observed testing several infection methods in the wild while adhering to a 'startup' culture mentality. |

The findings come from security researchers at [Proofpoint](#), who called the group TA444 and said it has been active in its current form of targeting cryptocurrency exchanges since at least 2017.

According to an advisory published earlier today, the group then adopted an upstart mentality at the end of 2022.

“Equally as surprising as the variance in delivery methods is the lack of a consistent payload at the end of the delivery chains,” reads the advisory from senior threat researcher Greg Lesnewich and the Proofpoint threat research team.

“When other financially-oriented threat actors test delivery methods, they tend to load their traditional payloads; this is not the case with TA444. This suggests [...] an embedded, or at least a devoted, malware development element alongside TA444 operators.”

Further, Proofpoint said they noticed a complete marketing strategy designed by TA444 to increase its annual recurring revenue (ARR) potential.

“It all starts with crafting lure content that may be of interest or necessity to the target. These can include analyses of cryptocurrency blockchains, job opportunities at prestigious firms, or salary adjustments.”

In terms of tools used during the attacks, Lesnewich wrote TA444 used “an impressive set of post-exploitation backdoors in its history.”

The list includes msoRAT, Cardinal, the Rantankba suite, Cheesetray and Dyepack, alongside passive backdoors, virtualized listeners and browser extensions to facilitate theft.

“While we may poke fun at its broad campaigns and ease of clustering, TA444 is an astute and capable adversary that is willing and able to defraud victims for hundreds of millions of dollars,” Proofpoint [wrote](#).

“TA444 and related clusters are assessed to have stolen nearly \$400m [...] worth of cryptocurrency and related assets in 2021. In 2022, the group surpassed that value in a single heist worth over \$500m, gathering more than \$1bn during 2022.”

The Proofpoint report comes days after the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) confirmed that North Korea’s Lazarus Group [was behind the \\$100m theft](#) from cryptocurrency firm Harmony.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Near record year US data breaches in 2022 |
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| SOURCE | https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/nearrecord-year-us-data-breaches/ |
| GIST | <p>The volume of publicly reported data breaches and leaks remained at a near-record level in 2022, although consumers and businesses are being let down by the paucity of information provided by breached companies, according to the Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC).</p> <p>The non-profit’s <i>2022 Data Breach Report</i> is compiled from company announcements, mainstream news media, government agencies, recognized security research firms and researchers, and other non-profit organizations.</p> <p>The overall volume of “data compromises” for the year stood at 1802, the vast majority of which (1774) were traditional breaches. The ITRC also recorded 18 data “exposures,” which are usually brought about by cloud misconfigurations, and 10 incidents where the details are still unknown.</p> <p>While total breach volumes have plateaued somewhat after last year’s record high of 1862 incidents, the number of impacted victims surged by over 40% year-on-year to 422 million.</p> |

However, this is largely down to a [major Twitter incident](#), which affected over 200 million individuals. Without this, the figure was on track to have declined by 33% over the period.

The next biggest breaches of the year were at Neopets (69 million) and AT&T Data (23 million).

Phishing and exploits remained the number one vector for breach actors, followed by ransomware.

The ITRC also flagged a concerning rise in supply chain attacks.

More than 10 million people were impacted by attacks targeting 1743 organizations with access to multiple companies' data, while 4.3 million people were affected by 70 malware-based cyber-attacks, the report revealed.

However, the ITRC's job is getting harder due to the increasingly opaque nature of public data breach notices. Just a third (34%) of these notices included both victim and attack details in 2022, the lowest figure in five years and a 50% decline from 2019.

"In other words, the information individuals and businesses needed to determine the risk to their identity information after a compromise was not included in approximately two-thirds of all public breach notices," wrote ITRC CEO, Eva Velasquez in her [opening remarks](#).

"The result of these trends is less reliable data that impairs the ability of individuals, businesses and government officials to make informed decisions about the risk of a data compromise and the actions to take in the aftermath of one."

This can partly be explained by the lack of a current federal breach notification law fit for the digital age, she continued.

Most states still put the burden of determining the risk of a data breach to those impacted on the organization that was compromised, which needlessly exposes consumers to a "scamdemic" of follow-on identity fraud, Velasquez argued.

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| HEADLINE | 01/26 Dark web adverts counterfeit cash surge |
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| SOURCE | https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/dark-web-posts-advertising/ |
| GIST | <p>There was a double-digit increase in deep and dark web ads and sellers promoting counterfeit currency last year, hinting at rising demand from the criminal community, threat intelligence experts have warned.</p> <p>Cybersixgill said it observed a 91% year-on-year increase in posts on the sites it monitored, and an 82% increase in the number of unique sellers in 2022.</p> <p>The vendor claimed that technology advances could be giving those at the top end of the market an edge. The top 10% of sellers are responsible for 80% of listings, it said.</p> <p>"It is possible that the vastly increased supply and growth of suppliers of counterfeit currency is a result of the proliferation of advanced printing technology and techniques, which enable more actors to produce convincing counterfeits with less difficulty," the report noted.</p> <p>"For example, a Massachusetts man was recently sentenced to prison after printing over \$400,000 in fake bills in an at-home operation that used an inkjet printer."</p> <p>This theory is backed by another finding of the report – a decrease in feedback provided to sellers of fake currency.</p> |

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| | <p>“Despite the overall rise in fake currency advertised on the underground, there was an approximately 53% decrease in feedback to these listings,” the report revealed.</p> <p>“If we assume that customers are more likely to write feedback when they are dissatisfied with the transaction, the inverse relationship between posts advertising counterfeit money and feedback on these posts suggests that customers are increasingly satisfied with the product and the supplier.”</p> <p>Despite the fact that cryptocurrency is often linked to cybercrime, traditional cash appears to remain a major source of criminal activity. The surge in supply via the dark web could be down to a rise in demand from criminals looking to finance their schemes, Cybersixgill claimed.</p> <p>“The large volume of posts advertising counterfeit currency on the underground indicates the enduring relevance of cash, despite the rise of digital currencies,” it concluded. “Unfortunately, the ultimate victims of money counterfeiting operations are the stores, local businesses and individuals who accept cash payments.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Cyberattacks target MS Exchange Servers |
| SOURCE | https://www.hackread.com/ms-exchange-servers-cyberattacks/ |
| GIST | <p>Most of the attacks occurred in the U.S. in November 2022, but some organizations in Austria, Poland, and Turkey were also targeted.</p> <p>Bitdefender Labs has shared its findings on a new wave of untargeted cyberattacks in which attackers are abusing two exploit chains to target on-premises MS Exchange servers.</p> <p>Findings Review</p> <p>Bitdefender noted that, at the end of November 2022, there was an increase in attacks leveraging two exploit chains identified as ProxyNotShell and OWASSRF to target MS Exchange servers. The researchers found that cybercriminals prefer to exploit on-premises Exchange servers 2013, 2016, and 2019.</p> <p>Vulnerabilities explained</p> <p>Attackers use two tactics in their new attacks against the MS Exchange servers. The first is the ProxyNotShell vulnerability, a combination of two already-disclosed vulnerabilities tracked as CVE-2022-41082 and CVE-2022-41080. It requires threat actors to authenticate to the vulnerable server; this vulnerability was patched in November 2022.</p> <p>OWASSRF is the other vulnerability exploited in this attack chain. This exploit uses the same two vulnerabilities but in a different way. It is capable of bypassing the ProxyNotShell mitigation solutions; it was used in the Rackspace attack in December 2022.</p> <p>Attack Details</p> <p>Technically, the attack is called server-side request forgeries/SSRF. It allows threat actors to send a specially crafted request from a vulnerable server to another server to access resources and fulfil their malicious objectives on the vulnerable server.</p> <p>Using the two vulnerabilities will allow the attacker to carry out remote code execution if they have the login credentials. They don’t necessarily have to be an administrator to perform desired actions, as any account can be used.</p> <p>Microsoft patched these vulnerabilities on September 30th and November 8th, 2022. This means only those companies that haven’t yet fixed their systems are at risk. Most of the attacks, according to Bitdefender’s blog post, occurred in the U.S. in November 2022, but some organizations in Austria, Poland, and Turkey were also targeted.</p> |

The attackers target companies from various sectors, including law and brokerage firms, real estate, consultancy firms, and wholesalers. So far, over 100,000 organizations worldwide have been targeted by SSRF attacks.

What is SSRF Attack?

SSRF attacks are increasingly popular among cybercriminals because, if a web app is vulnerable to SSRF, the attacker can send a request from the vulnerable server to any local network resource which isn't otherwise accessible to the attacker. Otherwise, the attacker would send a request to an external server, e.g., a cloud platform, to carry out specific actions on behalf of the vulnerable server.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 New stealthy Python RAT targets Windows |
| SOURCE | https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-stealthy-python-rat-malware-targets-windows-in-attacks/ |
| GIST | <p>A new Python-based malware has been spotted in the wild featuring remote access trojan (RAT) capabilities to give its operators control over the breached systems.</p> <p>Named PY#RATION by researchers at threat analytics company Securonix, the new RAT uses the WebSocket protocol to communicate with the command and control (C2) server and to exfiltrate data from the victim host.</p> <p>A technical report from the company analyzes how the malware works. The researchers note that the RAT is actively developed as they've seen multiple versions of it since August when the PY#RATION campaign started.</p> <p>Distribution via shortcut files</p> <p>The PY#RATION malware is distributed via a phishing campaign that uses password-protected ZIP file attachments containing two shortcut .LNK files disguised as images, namely <i>front.jpg.lnk</i> and <i>back.jpg.lnk</i>.</p> <p>When launched, the shortcuts victim sees the front and back of a driver's license. However, malicious code is also executed to contact the C2 (Pastebin in later attacks) and download two .TXT files ('front.txt' and 'back.txt') which are eventually renamed to BAT files to accommodate the malware execution.</p> <p>Upon launch, the malware creates the 'Cortana' and 'Cortana/Setup' directories in the user's temporary directory and then downloads, unpacks, and runs additional executable files from that location.</p> <p>Persistence is established by adding a batch file ('CortanaAssist.bat') into the user's startup directory. The use of Cortana, Microsoft's personal assistant solution on Windows, aims at disguising the malware entries as system files.</p> <p>Stealthy PY#RATION RAT</p> <p>The malware delivered to the target is a Python RAT packed into an executable using automated packers like 'pyinstaller' and 'py2exe,' which can convert Python code into Windows executables that include all the libraries required for its execution.</p> <p>This approach results in an inflated payload sizes, with version 1.0 (initial) being 14MB, and version 1.6.0 (latest) being 32MB. The more recent version is bigger because it features additional code (+1000 lines) and a layer of fernet encryption.</p> <p>This helps the malware evade detection, and according to Securonix's tests, version 1.6.0 of the payload deployed undetected by all but one antivirus engine on VirusTotal.</p> |

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| | <p>Securonix researchers say that the malware "leverages Python's built-in Socket.IO framework, which provides features to both client and server WebSocket communication." This channel is used for both communication and data exfiltration.</p> <p>The advantage of WebSockets is that the malware can simultaneously receive and send data from and to the C2 over a single TCP connection using ports commonly left open in networks like 80 and 443.</p> <p>The analysts noticed that the threat actors used the same C2 address ("169[.]239.129.108") throughout their campaign, from malware version 1.0 to 1.6.0.</p> <p>According to the researchers, the IP has not been blocked on the IPVoid checking system, indicating that PY#RATION has gone undetected for several months.</p> <p>At the moment details about specific campaigns using this piece of malware and its targets, distribution volume, and the operators behind it remain unclear.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Zacks investment research data breach |
| SOURCE | https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/zacks-investment-research-data-breach-affects-820-000-clients/ |
| GIST | <p>Hackers breached Zacks Investment Research (Zacks) company last year and gained access to personal and sensitive information belonging to 820,000 customers.</p> <p>Founded in 1978, the company helps investors with stock buying decisions by using advanced financial data analytics algorithms.</p> <p>Zacks discovered that at the end of last year that some customer records had been accessed without authorization. An internal investigation into the incident determined that a threat actor gained access to the network somewhere between November 2021 and August 2022.</p> <p>It is unclear if any data was stolen but the information exposed during the breach includes full names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and user passwords for the Zacks.com website.</p> <p>Such details would be valuable in the hands of phishing actors and scammers and might have made it possible for unauthorized users to access Zacks accounts and, by extension, any additional information stored on them.</p> <p>It appears that the data set belongs to a specific set of customers. In the data breach notice delivered to affected individuals, the company clarifies that the incident impacted only customers of the Zacks Elite product that joined between November 1999 and February 2005.</p> <p>Also, the investment research firm says it has no evidence that financial data has been exposed due to the security breach.</p> <p>"We have no reason to believe any customer credit card information, any other customer financial information, or any other customer personal information was accessed." - Zacks data breach notification</p> <p>After learning about the breach, Zacks has initiated the password reset procedure for compromised accounts, forcing users to choose new credentials on their next login.</p> <p>The company says that it also implemented extra security measures on the network and is actively working with an external cybersecurity specialist to develop and install additional protection systems in the immediate future.</p> |

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| | <p>Users impacted by this security incident are advised to remain vigilant against incoming communications, as scammers can now use their phone numbers and email addresses.</p> <p>Also, those using SMS-based 2FA (two-factor authentication) to secure online investment accounts should switch to a different phone number or 2FA method, as the exposed data can be leveraged by SIM swappers to port the numbers on clone cards and take control of the protected accounts.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Auction: source code League of Legends |
| SOURCE | https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hackers-auction-alleged-source-code-for-league-of-legends/ |
| GIST | <p>Threat actors are auctioning the alleged source code for Riot Game's League of Legends and the Packman anti-cheat software, confirmed to be stolen in a recent hack of the game company's developer environment.</p> <p>Last Friday, Riot Games disclosed that its development environment had been hacked, allowing threat actors to steal source code for League of Legends (LoL), Teamfight Tactics (TFT), and the company's Packman legacy anti-cheat platform.</p> <p>Yesterday, the company confirmed they had received a ransom note from the threat actor and said they would not be paying a ransom. Vice.com obtained this ransom note, which demanded \$10 million to prevent the stolen data from going public.</p> <p>In a conversation with security research group VX-Underground, the threat actors stated they gained access to Riot Game's network after performing a social engineering attack over SMS on one of the company's employees.</p> <p>The threat actors claimed that they had access to the development network for thirty-six hours until they were detected by the company's security operations center (SOC).</p> <p>They told VX their goal was to steal the source code for Riot Vanguard, the game company's anti-cheat software.</p> <p>Hacker begin selling stolen source code</p> <p>Last night, the threat actor behind the attack began selling the alleged source code for League of Legends and the legacy Packman anti-cheat platform on a popular hacking forum.</p> <p>The threat actor says they are selling the League of Legends source code and Packman for a minimum of \$1 million. However, they told BleepingComputer that they would be willing to sell Packman by itself for \$500,000.</p> <p>The forum post includes a link to a thousand-page PDF document that they claim contains a directory listing of the 72.4 GB of stolen source code. BleepingComputer reviewed this document, and it does appear to be a source code listing for software associated with Riot Games.</p> <p>While the threat would not share further proof of the stolen source code, they told us they shared some with Ryscu, a YouTuber who creates videos around League of Legends.</p> <p>Ryscu included a screenshot of this leaked source code in a YouTube video about the breach.</p> <p>BleepingComputer has been unable to independently verify if the source code is legitimate, and Riot Games has not responded to our queries about the source code sale.</p> <p>Is it worth \$1 million?</p> <p>The main concern regarding the stolen source code is that it could be used to create cheats or exploits to target the game and its players.</p> |

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| | <p>Other threat actors could also use the source code to potentially create exploits that could allow remote code execution on player's devices.</p> <p>"Truthfully, any exposure of source code can increase the likelihood of new cheats emerging. Since the attack, we've been working to assess its impact on anticheat and to be prepared to deploy fixes as quickly as possible if needed," tweeted Riot Games.</p> <p>While source code makes it easier to find bugs in code, it is also possible to find them using reverse engineering with little cost other than time.</p> <p>Therefore, only time will tell if this allegedly stolen source code is worth \$1 million to cheat developers and other threat actors.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 CISA: agencies hacked by legitimate tools |
| SOURCE | https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cisa-federal-agencies-hacked-using-legitimate-remote-desktop-tools/ |
| GIST | <p>CISA, the NSA, and MS-ISAC warned today in a joint advisory that attackers are increasingly using legitimate remote monitoring and management (RMM) software for malicious purposes.</p> <p>More worryingly, CISA discovered malicious activity within the networks of multiple federal civilian executive branch (FCEB) agencies using the EINSTEIN intrusion detection system after the release of a Silent Push report in mid-October 2022.</p> <p>This activity was linked to the "widespread, financially motivated phishing campaign" reported by Silent Push and was detected on "many other FCEB networks" after first being spotted on a single FCEB network in mid-September 2022.</p> <p>The attackers behind this campaign began sending help desk-themed phishing emails to federal staff's government and personal email addresses since at least mid-June 2022.</p> <p>"The authoring organizations assess that since at least June 2022, cyber criminal actors have sent help desk-themed phishing emails to FCEB federal staff's personal, and government email addresses," the advisory reads.</p> <p>"The emails either contain a link to a 'first-stage' malicious domain or prompt the recipients to call the cybercriminals, who then try to convince the recipients to visit the first-stage malicious domain."</p> <p>Callback phishing attacks like the ones targeting FCEB staff in this campaign have seen a massive 625% growth since Q1 2021 and have also been adopted by ransomware gangs.</p> <p>These groups include ones that split from the Conti cybercrime operation, such as the Silent Ransom Group, Quantum (now Dagon Locker), and Royal.</p> <p>Unlike normal phishing emails, callback phishing attacks do not include a link to a threat actor's website. Instead, they use lures, such as high-priced subscription renewals, to convince a target to call a listed phone number.</p> <p>When a target calls the number, they will be told to open a website to download the software required to refund the renewal price.</p> <p>When the emails embedded malicious links instead, the phishing domains used were designed to impersonate high-profile brands, including Microsoft, Amazon, and Paypal.</p> |

Clicking the embedded links would open the default web browser and automatically download malware designed to connect to a second-stage domain to download portable versions of AnyDesk and ScreenConnect that connect to the attackers' RMM server.

The use of portable remote desktop software executables allows malicious actors to gain access to the targets' systems as a local user without requiring admin permissions or a complete software installation, thus bypassing software controls and challenging common risk management assumptions.

FCEB networks breach linked to refund scammers

Once they managed to take a foothold on their targets' devices, the threat actors used their access to try and trick victims into logging into their bank accounts so that they could initiate refund scams.

"Although this specific activity appears to be financially motivated and targets individuals, the access could lead to additional malicious activity against the recipient's organization—from both other cybercriminals and APT actors," the advisory says.

"Malicious cyber actors could leverage these same techniques to target National Security Systems (NSS), Department of Defense (DoD), and Defense Industrial Base (DIB) networks and use legitimate RMM software on both work and home devices and accounts," the NSA [added](#).

Defenders are encouraged by CISA, NSA, and MS-ISAC to use [indicators of compromise](#) shared with the advisory to detect potential exploitation or compromise.

First-stage domain names used in the campaign follow naming patterns commonly utilized in IT help/support-themed social engineering scams: myhelpcare[.]online, myhelpcare[.]cc, hservice[.]live, gscare[.]live, nhelpcare[.]info, deskcareme[.]live, nhelpcare[.]cc, win03[.]xyz, win01[.]xyz, 247secure[.]us.

Another active domain in this campaign seen by BleepingComputer is winbackup01[.]xyz.

CISA encourages network defenders to review the advisory for indicators of compromise, best practices, and recommended mitigations, which highlights the threat of additional types of malicious activity using RMM, including its use as a backdoor for persistence and/or command and control (C2). — [CISA](#)

They also provided a [list of measures](#) designed to help mitigate such risks and ensure that networks are secure from incoming attack attempts.

To protect against potential security breaches, companies and organizations should audit installed remote access tools and identify authorized RMM software.

The use of application controls to prevent the execution of unauthorized RMM software and only utilizing authorized RMM software over approved remote access solutions, such as VPN or VDI, is also recommended, as is blocking both inbound and outbound connections on standard RMM ports and protocols.

To further enhance security, organizations should implement training programs and phishing exercises to raise awareness among their employees about the risks linked to phishing and spearphishing emails.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Kronos malware reemerges |
| SOURCE | https://securityintelligence.com/kronos-malware-reemerges-increased-functionality/?&web_view=true |
| GIST | The Evolution of Kronos Malware The Kronos malware is believed to have originated from the leaked source code of the Zeus malware, which was sold on the Russian underground in 2011. Kronos continued to evolve and a new variant of Kronos emerged in 2014 and was reportedly sold on the darknet for approximately \$7,000. Kronos is |

typically used to download other malware and has historically been used by threat actors to deliver different types of malware to victims.

After remaining dormant for a few years, the Kronos banking trojan reemerged in 2018, under the name Osiris, and was used in a banking trojan campaign. While there were some differences between the two strains, both Osiris and Kronos shared the same technique for stealing information.

Kronos made yet another resurgence — this time combined with ransomware — and in late 2022 IBM Security Trusteer saw an increase in Kronos malware activity in Mexico. In these attacks, it was used to launch JavaScript web-injects on financial institutions with a malicious chrome extension.

A Brief Review of the Kronos Malware Attack in Mexico

The first victim of the 2022 Kronos malware had the malware automatically installed through a malicious chrome extension called “Seguridad” (Security).

This is the first time we have observed malware utilizing a chrome extension with web injects on financial institutions.

This payload can then be used to steal sensitive information from the victim’s device.

Stealthy Web Injection Capabilities

During an investigation of the Kronos malware’s web-injects, it was found that the main goal of the attacker is to steal sensitive information from the victim, such as login credentials (username, password), mobile tokens, OTP tokens, and more. These stolen pieces of information can then be used by the attacker to gain unauthorized access to the victim’s accounts or to commit other fraudulent activities.

Once a user is infected with the Kronos malware, the malware may wait for the user to enter their login credentials on a targeted website. At this point, the JavaScript component of the malware will begin to inject itself into the victim’s web browser, displaying a fake loading animation (commonly known as a “loader gif”) in order to obscure the fact that the user’s information is being stolen. This technique is commonly used by malware to avoid detection and increase the likelihood of successfully stealing sensitive information from the victim...

The malware may then prompt the user for additional sensitive information, such as a telephone number, under the guise of verifying the user’s identity. This information is then used by the attacker for various nefarious purposes.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Contractor error: Baltimore schools attack |
| SOURCE | https://www.techtarget.com/searchsecurity/news/252529592/Contractor-error-led-to-Baltimore-schools-ransomware-attack?&web_view=true |
| GIST | <p>A 2020 ransomware attack against Baltimore County Public Schools began with a contractor error, according to a report released Monday by Maryland's Office of the Inspector General for Education.</p> <p>Baltimore County Public Schools, a district representing 115,000 students, disclosed a major ransomware attack in November 2020. Few details were provided about the attack's specifics at the time, but the school system referred to it as a "catastrophic attack on our technology system." The school was closed to students on Monday, Nov. 30 and Tuesday, Dec. 1.</p> <p>More details were provided in the Monday report, published by Maryland's Office of the Inspector General for Education (OIGE). The role of the inspector general for education, currently Richard P. Henry for the state, is to detect and prevent fraud as well as assure that state funds are allocated appropriately.</p> |

According to the report, the OIGE began their investigation "after receiving a complaint alleging that the Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) system disregarded the recommendations made by the Maryland Office of Legislative Audits (OLA) during their 2008, 2015, and 2020 audit reports."

"It was further alleged that the repeated OLA findings indicated that the BCPS IT division was not prepared for the cyberattack and failed to protect the personally identifiable information (PII) of students, staff, and BCPS retirees," the report read. "Lastly, it was alleged that the BCPS failed to disclose the cost associated with ransomware demands, the recovery of information, and improving the IT network following the cyberattack."

The OIGE report found that the cyberattack occurred 15 days prior to when the BCPS network was disrupted on Nov. 24, when an educator received a phishing email with an attachment that they attempted to open but could not. The staffer then contacted a "BCPS tech liaison," which is a member of BCPS staff dedicated to handling basic IT inquiries, who then concluded the email was suspicious.

The tech liaison then forwarded the email to the BCPS district IT security contractor. The investigation found the contractor then "mistakenly opened the email with the attachment using their unsecured BCPS email domain account and not in their secured email domain." It was this mistake that delivered the malware into BCPS' network.

The OIGE investigation found more problems that contributed to the devastating ransomware attack.

"An analysis of the antivirus software used at the time of this incident determined that it was unable to detect the malware program used during this cyberattack," the report read. "Additionally, the malware used by the threat actor(s) had been programmed to delay its initial execution to avoid immediate detection. This delay allowed the malware to disable systematically critical functions within the BCPS network that could have prevented the malware from facilitating its attack."

The OIGE determined that contrary to the complaint, the school district had implemented several of OLA's recommendations, though it had not followed the recommendation to relocate on-premises database servers. Following the attack, the district switched to an encrypted cloud environment.

The OIGE report determined that the ransomware attack has to date cost the school district over \$9.6 million between recovery costs, system upgrades and migration to the new platform.

A spokesperson with Baltimore County Public Schools shared a statement with TechTarget Editorial in response to the OIGE report.

"The OIGE report highlights BCPS' extensive and immediate recovery efforts that have now positioned the system years ahead of other school systems across the state and nation in cyber defense," the statement read.

"Superintendent Darryl Williams made notable efforts to address the technology infrastructure needs of the system prior to the cyberattack in his first proposed operating budget for the school system, however, those requests were not funded."

It continued, "Additionally, it is important to note the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) directed BCPS to refrain from sharing information regarding the attack during and after the investigation. BCPS already has implemented many of the recommendations of the OIGE report, and its recovery efforts have been cited nationally as the gold standard of prevention and defense. BCPS was a victim -- just as scores of other school systems and governmental and health care institutions across the nation that have been the target of sophisticated cyberattacks on critical technical infrastructures -- and the blame solely rests with the perpetrators who facilitated the attack."

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| SOURCE | https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/yahoo-impersonated-brand-q4-2022/?&web_view=true |
| GIST | <p>Security researchers at Check Point have revealed that Yahoo knocked DHL off the top spot as the most imitated brand in the last quarter of 2022, now responsible for 20% of all phishing attempts recorded in the wild.</p> <p>The findings come from the company's latest Brand Phishing Report and suggest that several cyber-criminals had been found distributing emails with subject lines that told a recipient they had won prize money from initiatives organized by Yahoo, worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Email senders showed names such as 'Award Promotion' or 'Award Center.'</p> <p>The phishing messages also warned that the target must refrain from telling people about winning the prize because of legal issues. It asked the recipient to share their personal information and bank details in order to receive the winning prize money into their accounts.</p> <p>As for other brands most impersonated in Q4 2022, DHL came in second place with 16% of all brand phishing attempts, and Microsoft followed in the third spot with 11%.</p> <p>Industry-wise, Check Point said the technology sector was the most imitated by brand phishing in the last quarter of 2022, followed by shipping and social networks.</p> <p>"We are seeing hackers trying to bait their targets by offering awards and significant amounts of money. Remember, if it looks too good to be true, it almost always is," warned Omer Dembinsky, data group manager at Check Point Software.</p> <p>"You can protect yourself from a brand phishing attack by not clicking on suspicious links or attachments and by always checking the URL of the page you are directed to. Look for misspellings and do not volunteer unnecessary information."</p> <p>The Check Point report comes a couple of months after Egress security researchers noticed a 78% increase in email impersonation attacks spoofing the Netflix brand in October 2022.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Groups angry: Facebook lifts Trump ban |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/26/reckless-fury-among-rights-groups-as-facebook-lifts-trump-ban |
| GIST | <p>The news that Meta will allow Donald Trump back on Facebook and Instagram following a two-year ban has been met with fury and indignation among civil rights and online safety advocates.</p> <p>The former US president will be allowed to return to the platforms "in coming weeks" but "with new guardrails in place to deter repeat offences", Meta's president of global affairs, Nick Clegg, wrote in a blogpost explaining the decision on Wednesday.</p> <p>The Anti-Defamation League, the NAACP, Free Press, Media Matters and other groups expressed concern about Facebook's ability to prevent any future attacks on the democratic process or quell misinformation.</p> <p>"Make no mistake – by allowing Donald Trump back on its platforms, Meta is refuelling Trump's misinformation and extremism engine," said Angelo Carusone, president and CEO of media watchdog Media Matters for America.</p> <p>"When Trump is given a platform, it ratchets up the temperature on a landscape that is already simmering – one that will put us on a path to increased violence."</p> <p>Trump was removed from Meta platforms after the Capitol riots on 6 January 2021, during which he posted unsubstantiated claims that the election had been stolen, praised increasingly violent protesters and condemned former vice-president Mike Pence even as the mob threatened his life.</p> |

Democratic congresswoman Jan Schakowsky said reinstating Trump's accounts "will only fan the flames of hatred and division that led to an insurrection".

"The Capitol community is still picking up the pieces from the January 6th insurrection that Trump ignited, and now he is returning to the virtual scene of the crime," she tweeted.

In a statement explaining the decision to allow Trump to return, Clegg said: "The public should be able to hear what their politicians are saying – the good, the bad and the ugly – so that they can make informed choices at the ballot box."

"In the event that Mr Trump posts further violating content, the content will be removed and he will be suspended for between one month and two years, depending on the severity of the violation."

Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, said that Trump should not be given a platform to "spread hate and incite violence".

"There is no reason to believe the former president will behave differently now that the platform has reversed his ban. This isn't a matter of free speech; there are ample services that Trump can use to spread his message. This is a business decision to platform bigotry and divisiveness to drive clicks and engagement, plain and simple."

Free Press Co-CEO Jessica J. González, described the announcement as a "cowardly and unethical decision" that "will cause incalculable harm".

She urged Meta to reverse course and said Trump would only continue to use the company's "powerful tools" to "spread lies and dangerous rhetoric, and incite violence targeted at disenfranchised communities and his ideological enemies".

"Meta must bear full responsibility for any harm that results from today's extremely reckless decision," González said.

Meta initially outsourced its decision about whether to remove Trump permanently to its oversight board: a group of appointed academics and former politicians, that operate independent of Meta's leadership to scrutinise the company's moderation decisions.

That group ruled in May 2021 that Trump's penalties should not be "indeterminate", but kicked the final ruling back to Meta, and played no role in his readmission to the platform.

Nicolas Suzor, a professor at Queensland's University of Technology School of Law and member of the Oversight Board, told the Guardian that the announcement "follows through on [Meta's] commitments to us to develop clear and accountable processes in high profile cases like this".

"Many other tech companies have not done this work (or have gone backwards recently) and their senior executives still make decisions behind closed doors that impact us all."

However, a group of scholars, advocates and activists calling itself the Real Facebook Oversight Board – operating in opposition to Meta's board – said the decision, "sends a message that there are no real consequences even for inciting insurrection and a coup."

Some free speech advocates have agreed with Clegg, saying it is appropriate for the public to have access to messaging from political candidates.

Jameel Jaffer, executive director at the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University and a former American Civil Liberties Union official, defended the reinstatement. He had previously endorsed the company's decision to suspend Trump's account.

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| | <p>“This is the right call – not because the former president has any right to be on the platform but because the public has an interest in hearing directly from candidates for political office,” he said in a statement on Wednesday.</p> <p>“It’s better if the major social media platforms err on the side of leaving speech up, even if the speech is offensive or false, so that it can be addressed by other users and other institutions.”</p> <p>American Civil Liberties Union executive director Anthony Romero said Meta was making “the right call” by allowing Trump back on to the social network.</p> <p>“Like it or not, President Trump is one of the country’s leading political figures and the public has a strong interest in hearing his speech,” Romero said in a release.</p> <p>The ACLU has filed more than 400 legal actions against Trump, according to Romero.</p> <p>Trump has not indicated whether he will return to the platform but responded to the news with a short statement on Truth Social, saying that “such a thing should never happen again to a sitting president”.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Tech layoffs: boom and bust |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/25/briefing/tech-layoffs-economy.html |
| GIST | <p>The layoff announcements dropped one after another, accelerating throughout the second half of 2022. Amazon began laying off what will be 18,000 employees. Lyft, the ride-share company, said it would dismiss 700 of its workers, or 13 percent of its staff. The technology giants Meta and Twitter announced that they were cutting thousands of employees.</p> <p>The new year brought even more bleeding in Silicon Valley: Last week, Google’s parent company, Alphabet, said it planned to lay off 12,000 of its workers, Microsoft said it would cut 10,000 employees and on Monday, Spotify said it would reduce its staff by 6 percent, about 600 people. Add up the losses and more than 216,000 tech employees have been laid off since the start of 2022, according to Layoffs.fyi, a site that tracks job cuts in the sector.</p> <p>The layoffs have an ominous feel to anyone who is tracking news on the economy and the tumult in recent months relating to inflation, interest rates and the labor market. But the tech job cuts are not necessarily bad news for the economy overall, or even for Silicon Valley. (They account for about 4 percent of the tech sector’s total workers.) In today’s newsletter, I will explain what the cuts mean for the broader economy.</p> <p>Boom and bust</p> <p>To understand why tech companies are laying off workers now, turn back to the pandemic, when the industry was booming. In 2020 and 2021, sales spiked for companies like Amazon, as e-commerce took off and consumers who were suddenly spending much more time at home were buying goods at a record pace.</p> <p>Demand for workers quickly escalated, and tech companies were competing against each other to hire talent. A virtual gold rush was on for engineers, according to my colleague Tripp Mickle, a reporter based in San Francisco who covers Apple and the tech industry.</p> <p>As the pandemic waned, many companies faced a new problem: They had been on a hiring binge, but now they were confronting a possible recession — and heavy pressure from investors to scale back.</p> <p>“Now, tech is in a position of resetting itself,” Tripp said. “But if you look at the fundamentals of most of these businesses, they remain pretty strong. It’s just that they went through a period of accelerated growth, and the ability to sustain that is difficult.”</p> |

Still, the layoffs contain at least one positive sign for the labor market: A lot of traditional industries need tech employees, so this is an opportunity for those companies to scoop up talent. The health care industry, the federal government, private companies in retail or manufacturing — all of them need engineers and other people with high-tech skills. What is Google's loss could be Walmart's gain.

But there are no signs that the layoffs will end anytime soon, especially as the Federal Reserve has suggested that it will keep increasing interest rates this year to try to cool the economy.

Early warning

Consider the tech industry's place in the broader economy — and whether tech layoffs will spread to other industries.

One factor that makes the tech industry stand out is its dependence on valuation, since companies often raise a lot of money to pour into risky or unproven assets. Companies that are very forward looking tend to take a hit when interest rates increase, which could partly explain the waves of layoffs, Jeanna Smialek, a Times reporter who covers the Federal Reserve and the economy, told me.

The tech sector can be a leading indicator, telling us where the economy is headed before the rest of the economy goes there.

"You don't want to dismiss tech layoffs as meaningless," Jeanna said. "They can sometimes be the canary in the coal mine."

But she also warned not to read too much into them. Besides being especially market-sensitive, the tech sector is a very small slice of the overall work force in the United States — about 2 percent of all jobs in the economy. Jobless claims overall remain very low, and more than 10.5 million jobs are open across the country.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Online tool: sex assault victims resources |
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| SOURCE | https://www.q13fox.com/news/new-tool-aims-at-connecting-victims-of-rape-with-resources-sooner |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE - Health and advocacy providers have launched a new tool to help connect victims of sexual assault to resources.</p> <p>The "connector tool" is a collaboration between the King County Sexual Assault Resource Center, KCSARC, Seattle Indian Health Board, the University of Washington departments of Psychiatry and Psychology and Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center.</p> <p>KCSARC's Chief Program Officer, Lorraine Lynch says the five leaders saw a delay in getting survivors the tools necessary to cope with the traumatic experience.</p> <p>"We wanted we recognize that it's really important that survivors are connected as quickly as possible to help improve their long term outcomes and recovery and healing," Lynch said.</p> <p>The three-step "connector tool" has been in the works since the summer of 2022 and is now live.</p> <p>"It lets a survivor know they're not alone," Lynch said.</p> <p>The tool was created specifically for Seattle residents with the goal of hoping to close the gap and ensuring survivors have access at any point along the way.</p> <p>"Long-term recovery after sexual assault is not only possible but likelier when a survivor receives immediate support and validation," said George Gonzalez, Assistant Director, Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center.</p> |

A quick QR code scan takes you to the homepage of the tool – a simple confidential survey to help victims of rape or those looking for someone they know.

A user-friendly questionnaire during a difficult time was important as the end goal is to get survivors help immediately.

"Survivors in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault they are overwhelmed and aren't sure where to go," Lynch said.

The tool helps victims access advocacy, therapy, legal and medical resources including access to a free sexual assault forensic exam, often called a "rape kit".

Advocates say the need is increasing.

In 2021, 5059 individuals and their families accessed direct services at KSCARC.

KCSARC says they've seen a 23% increase in the last five years.

They helped:

- 4,100 people in 2017
- 4,888 in 2018
- 4,905 in 2019
- 4,560 in 2020
- 37% of those benefiting are in Seattle and 43% in South King County.

"Just being able to connect survivors and help them with their healing journey is really exciting," Lynch said.

The tool is available to everyone.... and help will be given whether you've reported your incident to police or not.

According to KCSARC out of 1000 sexual assaults 975 perpetrators walk free.

Their data shows out of 310 sexual assaults reported, 50 lead to an arrest, 28 cases will end up with a felony conviction and only 25 perpetrators will be incarcerated.

"Whether or not a survivor reports or their cases assigned or moves through the justice system," Lynch said. "We want to ensure that survivors are connected to all of these other resources."

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The "connector tool" is now live, [here's a link](#).
Help is available in both English and Spanish: [Spanish](#) at [SeattleAyuda.org](#)

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Parts rural Pierce Co. high speed internet |
| SOURCE | https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/community/gateway/g-news/article271551187.html |
| GIST | <p>High-speed internet is coming to the Key Peninsula. Pierce County announced in a news release Monday that they're partnering with Comcast.</p> <p>The agreement: "will expand the availability of high-speed internet services on the Key Peninsula," the release said.</p> <p>The internet expansion will bring a "fast and reliable fiber-rich network and a full suite of services to over 526 Key Peninsula homes and businesses," according to the release.</p> <p>The project is estimated to cost around \$5 million. Pierce County is contributing \$3.75 million from the American Rescue Plan Act.</p> |

“In July 2021 Pierce County committed \$15 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money to help with efforts to bridge the broadband gaps across the county,” Erin Babbo, communications manager for Pierce County, told the Gateway Tuesday. “All ARPA funds must be spent by 2026 and meet grantor requirements.”

The rest of the cost for the Key Peninsula project will be covered by Comcast, Babbo said.

Comcast will also build the infrastructure.

“Now, more than ever, it is crucial that people have access to high-speed Internet,” Pierce County Executive Bruce Dammeier said in the release. “Whether for work, school or entertainment, we want to help all county residents enjoy the benefits of this important infrastructure.”

Pierce County and Comcast expect construction to begin around the end of this summer after they finalize the design and begin the permitting process, Babbo said.

They estimate construction to be complete by the end of 2024, Babbo said.

“Once permits are obtained and construction has begun in the public rights of way, Comcast will create an online resource for residents seeking information about the network build in their neighborhood, including answers to frequently asked questions and product and service details,” the news release said.

Plans for this project began in November 2021, when Pierce County began seeking potential partners to expand broadband internet access in areas of Pierce County identified as unserved or underserved, Babbo said.

“Comcast was one of the respondents selected for their proposal to serve addresses in the North Key Peninsula Broadband Development District,” Babbo said.

Large parts of the Key Peninsula do not have access to internet service that meets a minimum speed of 25 mbps download/3 mbps upload, Babbo told the Gateway.

“Pierce County recognizes the public benefit that broadband service can contribute to the economic development and quality of life for local communities and businesses within underserved and unserved areas,” Babbo said. “All our communities need to have access to this essential utility.”

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST RESIDENTS?

Once the expanded network has been activated on the Key Peninsula, prices will vary per plan.

Comcast residential internet services range from \$19.99 to \$80 a month, according to their website, and business internet services range from \$49.99 to \$349.99 a month.

Residents will be able to sign up for the company’s Internet Essentials program, which provides low-cost, high-speed broadband for income-constrained households, according to Babbo.

The Internet Essentials program offers free internet for qualifying residents through an application process.

“Comcast has connected more than 21,000 households in Pierce County to high-speed Internet at home, many for the first time, through the Internet Essentials program,” Babbo said.

Others may qualify for the Affordable Connectivity Program, Babbo said, which gives qualifying households a \$30 monthly credit toward internet and mobile services.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Terror organizations human trafficking |
| SOURCE | https://www.acamstoday.org/why-terrorist-organizations-use-human-trafficking/ |
| GIST | <p>Human trafficking (HT) is used by terrorist organizations to exploit individuals and to carry out or support terrorist activities. In fact, terrorist organizations using HT for financial gain appear to be rarer than the trafficking of human beings for other exploitative purposes that support the organizations' activities. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) highlighted that the small amounts generated by the Islamic State [group] in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL [IS throughout the article], also known as Da'esh) indicate that HT is not a lucrative source of revenue for IS and concluded that HT is considered more as a means of meeting the demands of IS fighters.² In this regard, the individuals who are held captive by terrorist organizations are mainly enslaved and forced into labor so fighters can devote their attention to their respective activities. The enslavement of individuals results in the free provision of services, which is not quantifiable in monetary terms but cuts operational costs and increases organizational efficiency.</p> <p>Sexual Exploitation</p> <p>In a study conducted by the Henry Jackson Society, Nikita Malik stated, "Terrorists use sexual violence, including rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage, to bolster recruits, galvanize fighters, and, in the case of Islamist groups, punish a Kafir (Arabic for disbeliever)."³</p> <p>Labor Exploitation</p> <p>The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) stated that "men and boys have been not only forcibly recruited and indoctrinated but also subjected to forced labour in agriculture (e.g., on sheep and poultry farms in Iraq) and on construction projects. One example of the latter is [IS'] use of trafficked people to build a tunnel system under the streets of Mosul. The tunnels were responsible for significant casualties and for extending the siege of the city."⁵</p> <p>Fighters can also benefit from individuals held in slavery in various ways, such as by "employing" them in their homes as domestic servants. For example, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) reported, "Yazidi women and girls are forced to cook for their respective fighter-owners and other [IS] fighters housed with or near him. One Yazidi girl, 13 years old, was held for 11 months in [IS-controlled] territory and sold multiple times. Sexually enslaved, she recounted also being forced to cook, clean and wash the clothes of her Syrian fighter-owner and his family at a house in Raqqa city."⁶</p> <p>HT as a Terrorist Tactic</p> <p>HT, in the context of terrorism, can be used by terrorist organizations to achieve some of their strategic objectives. CTED identifies three purposes for the strategic use of HT by terrorist organizations: Namely, to intimidate populations and decimate communities, to institutionalize sexual violence and slavery, and to drive recruitment efforts.</p> <p>To Intimidate Populations and Decimate Communities</p> <p>One of the most notable examples of the use of HT to intimidate populations and decimate communities is the IS's ethnic cleansing targeting minorities, especially the Yazidi community. Among these minorities, it is also worth mentioning the Shia Turkmen, Shia Shabak and Christian communities, which were considered "infidel unbelievers" and therefore persecuted. In addition to the severe violence perpetrated against these minorities, HT is used in its most horrendous form, where individuals are considered commodities. In this regard, IS engaged in the trade and purchase of unmarried women and girls in open slave markets, while boys were forcibly recruited and given new names, trained for combat in camps and used as human shields.⁷</p> <p>To Institutionalize Sexual Violence and Slavery</p> <p>The Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence published by the United Nations Security Council in 2018 stated that conflict-related sexual violence is a weapon of war and a source of profit for state actors and non-state armed groups. In addition, the report pointed out, "Wars are still being fought on and over the bodies of women, to control their production and reproduction by force. Across</p> |

regions, sexual violence has been perpetrated in public or witnessed by loved ones, to terrorize communities and fracture families through the violation of taboos, signifying that nothing is sacred and no one is safe.”⁸ Acts of sexual violence, domestic servitude and other forms of sexual enslavement have been at the core of IS, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab’s modus operandi. For example, in the territory occupied by IS in Iraq, Sunni women and girls endured forced marriages as well as rape as a way of punishment for disobeying IS rules. In Nigeria, women and girls endured the same forms of sexual violence by Boko Haram members and faced acute social stigmatization upon their return because they were seen as sympathizers. In Somalia, there were reports of women and girls being trafficked by Al-Shabaab by being held as sex slaves or forced to become the “wives” of insurgents. Many of these women and their children were deeply traumatized and reluctant to seek assistance for fear of persecution.

To Drive Recruitment Efforts

In addition to using HT to recruit individuals for various brutal purposes, such as sexual and labor exploitation, combat or service roles, terrorist organizations use these HT victims to attract new recruits. This strategy can be observed in IS propaganda campaigns, which aim to lure potential male fighters to join their cause. The sexual slavery propaganda serves as an incentive for new recruits and foreign fighters, with the promise of wives and sex slaves acting as a “pull factor.”⁹ *The New York Times* has also reported, “The trafficking of women has been used to reward fighters, and as a recruiting tool to lure men from deeply conservative Muslim societies, where casual sex is taboo and dating is forbidden.”¹⁰ In addition, children are often featured in IS propaganda through “[photographs] eulogizing them as martyrs and widely circulated videos of young boys executing (via shootings or beheadings) prisoners accused of being spies or captured Syrian regime troops.”¹¹

HT and Terrorist Financing

As per the FATF, terrorist financing can be defined as the financing of terrorist acts, terrorists and terrorist organizations.¹² As previously mentioned, terrorist organizations using HT for financial gain seems to be rarer than the trafficking of human beings for other exploitative purposes to support the organizations’ activities. This can be partly attributed to the fact that terrorist organizations operate primarily in conflict-stricken regions where access to formal financial services is limited (e.g., the Sahel region in sub-Saharan Africa). In addition, as the FATF indicates, “The purposes and processes of terrorist financing and related activities are fundamentally different from those of money laundering; and ‘money is only one of a number of essentially interchangeable instruments that can be exchanged for one another’ in order for terrorist groups to obtain the end-use goods and other resources they need.”¹³ These factors are based on the Terrorist Resourcing Model published by the Integrated Threat Assessment Centre (ITAC) in 2007, which stresses that terrorist entities do not depend only on money to power their operations. It is also worth highlighting that money laundering is based on greed, while terrorist financing/resourcing is primarily based on pushing a political or ideological agenda. In the context of terrorist financing/resourcing, money and other resources are the enablers of their activities.

Nevertheless, financial gain remains one of the reasons terrorist groups engage in the trafficking of human beings. The FATF stated that “terrorist organizations who have controlled, or partially controlled territory, have used human trafficking as a way to raise funds and support [for] their organizations and activities.”¹⁴ It is also worth pointing out that unlike drugs, oil or other single-use goods, enslaved individuals are considered as “reusable commodities” as they can be exploited many times and for several purposes.

Enslaving Women

In addition to gratifying their fighters, terrorist organizations enable individual fighters to generate revenue through the sale of women. FATF stated that “[IS] has provided internal guidance to its fighters regarding how many female slaves they are allowed to maintain; however, the prices [IS] fighters are paying for their slaves appear to be relatively low (approximately \$13).”¹⁵ UNHRC reported that “Some Yazidi women and girls were present at their sale, and were aware of the amounts paid for them, which ranged between [\$200 and \$1,500], depending on marital status, age, number of children, and beauty.”¹⁶ It is important to point out that slave markets are intended to be internal only. As a result, it is arguable whether the IS slave trade constitutes terrorist financing. In addition, the sale and resale of Yazidi women and girls outside of IS is forbidden and punishable by death because slaves are considered the spoils of war, as

well as to prevent them from being sold back to their families, given that fighters would earn significant amounts ranging from \$10,000 to \$40,000. However, as CTED states, such rules are frequently violated.¹⁷

Trafficking in Persons for Ransom

Trafficking in persons for ransom is part of a terrorist organization's strategic objectives to fuel insecurity, and it also represents a highly profitable funding source. As a result, it is a common modus operandi for terrorist organizations. Unlike the sale of women, which is supposed to be internal only, the ransom payment constitutes terrorism financing since the payment is made by individuals outside the terrorist organization. While it is possible to argue whether ransom constitutes a form of exploitation,¹⁸ it is worth noting that individuals may be abducted for the purpose of ransom. In addition, in the context of terrorism, the ransom is the final element of the exploitation to which individuals are subjected. In this regard, terrorist organizations derive financial or other kinds of benefits from their exploitation, which amounts to HT.

CTED stated that "Many terrorist groups (notably [IS], Al-Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant (ANF), Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Boko Haram and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)) continue to profit from [kidnapping for ransom]."¹⁹ According to CTED, the financial gain terrorist organizations derive from ransom is significant, as families would "pay between \$10,000 and \$40,000 to secure the release of their family members."²⁰ In addition, the United Nations Security Council highlighted, "According to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), [IS] received between \$35 million to \$45 million in 2014 from ransom payments made by the families of hostages. It is believed that \$850,000 was paid in January 2015 for the release of 200 Iraqi Yazidi."²¹ In addition, the BBC reported, "At least 1,409 students were kidnapped from their schools in northern Nigeria in the 19 months between March 2020 and September 2021, according to Nigerian intelligence platform SBM, and at least 220 million naira (\$530,000; £410,000) paid out as ransoms [and that] the Nigerian government reportedly paid 3 million euro (\$3.3 million; £2.4 million) to Boko Haram as ransom for the Chibok girls freed in negotiations."²²

HT for the Removal of Organs

Reuters reported that a document from IS retrieved by the U.S. Special Forces in the Syrian Arab Republic justified the harvesting and removal of organs of "infidels," stating, "The apostate's life and organs do not have to be respected and may be taken with impunity."²³ According to data disclosed by the Director General of the Syria Coroner's Office in November 2016, "More than 25,000 surgical operations were performed in the refugee camps of neighboring countries and [IS-controlled] areas in Syria since 2011 to remove the organs of 15,000 Syrians and sell them on the black market, according to a news outlet."²⁴ It is worth highlighting that Interpol expressed concerns of trafficking for the removal of organs in North and West Africa, where impoverished communities and displaced populations (e.g., migrants, asylum seekers and refugees) are at greater risk of exploitation. Interpol also mentioned, "There is a wide spectrum of key actors involved in [trafficking in human beings for organ removal] in North and West Africa with connections to several countries on the continent and beyond, particularly in Asia and the Middle East."²⁵

Conclusion

Disrupting and dismantling the financial flows of HT and terrorist networks is essential in order to combat these threats. Without human and financial resources, the capability and activity of terrorist organizations are degraded. As CTED points out, "Following the money could help disrupt potential exploitation networks, strengthen the detection of victims, and help bring perpetrators to justice."²⁶ As a result, the financial sector and particularly financial intelligence units play a key role in the analysis of financial flows and transactions that may be linked to HT cases that support or finance terrorist organizations. Although it can constitute a significant challenge for financial institutions (FIs) to identify activity related to HT in the context of terrorist organizations, there are publications discussing and addressing these issues. Among the main resources available, FATF set out a list of recommendations as well as indicators and red flags pertaining to HT in general and OSCE synthesized financial indicators and red flags extracted from various resources.²⁷ In the same regard, FATF and FINTRAC set out lists of recommendations or indicators and red flags pertaining specifically to terrorist financing.²⁸ These risk indicators and red flags, as well as the cited resources in this article, can further strengthen FIs' capacity to

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| | detect illicit flows deriving from HT and to prevent terrorist organizations from accomplishing their overall objectives and most importantly committing serious human right violations. |
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| HEADLINE | 01/26 China's mining ambitions in Afghanistan |
| SOURCE | https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Terrorism/China-s-mining-ambitions-in-Afghanistan-haunted-by-militants |
| GIST | <p>KARACHI -- Escalating threats from Islamist militants are casting doubt on the future of big-money Chinese mining projects in Afghanistan.</p> <p>Earlier this month, Xinjiang Central Asia Petroleum and Gas (CAPEIC) signed a 25-year oil extraction deal with the Afghan Taliban authorities for the Amu River oil field in northwestern Afghanistan. The company is expected to invest \$150 million in the first year of the contract and \$540 million over three years.</p> <p>This is the Taliban's first known international investment deal since it swept to power in August 2021, promising the globally isolated regime desperately needed cash. China is also reportedly in talks with the Taliban to exploit massive copper reserves in Mes Aynak, 40 kilometers southeast of Kabul.</p> <p>However, China's growing economic footprint in Afghanistan is attracting unwanted attention from militants. ISIS-K, the regional affiliate of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan, has stepped up hostile rhetoric against Beijing.</p> <p>Last September, ISIS-K published an in-depth editorial titled "China's Daydream of Imperialism" in its Voice of Khorasan magazine. The article warned that China's pursuit of resources in Muslim lands and its treatment of its own Muslim Uyghur population in the Xinjiang autonomous region could lead to conflict with the group, according to Lucas Webber, editor of Militant Wire, a website analyzing militancy.</p> <p>After the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan a year and a half ago, it appears that ISIS-K is finding space to operate freely in the country, and it has begun to make good on its threats against Chinese interests.</p> <p>In December, ISIS-K claimed responsibility for an attack at a Kabul hotel popular with Chinese citizens. This month, an attack on Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry was thought to be targeting a Chinese delegation inside, although there has been no independent verification of this claim.</p> <p>"This is an extremely outrageous terrorist attack, and we are deeply shocked by it," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said of the hotel attack. Saying Beijing appreciated the Afghan security forces' "sharp reaction," he added, "We also call on the Afghan interim government to take strong and resolute measures to ensure the security of Chinese nationals, institutions and projects in Afghanistan."</p> <p>While ISIS-K has targeted various foreign missions and a Sikh temple in the past year, China appears to be a prime target due its ties with the Taliban -- short of officially recognizing their government -- and the economic lifeline it seems to be lending the regime.</p> <p>"There is a significant Chinese business contingent in the country, and there have been some landings of noncommercial Chinese aircraft over the past year," Asfandiyar Mir, a senior South Asia expert at the U.S. Institute of Peace, told Nikkei Asia.</p> <p>Experts agree that ISIS-K is the largest Islamist organization with China in its crosshairs and that it poses significant security risks to Beijing's diplomatic and economic presence in Afghanistan.</p> <p>The Turkistan Islamic Party, another insurgent group that advocates for the rights of Uyghur Muslims, is reported to have established bases in the northeastern Afghan province of Badakhshan. The group,</p> |

however, is under pressure from its Taliban hosts to refrain from attacking Chinese interests inside Afghanistan or using Afghan soil to launch operations against such targets abroad, Mir said.

"It seems that the TIP is redirecting itself as a political movement, possibly due to Chinese pressure on the Taliban," said Abdul Basit, research fellow at the Singapore-based S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. This, however, may be helping ISIS-K strengthen its ranks by recruiting disgruntled militants who want to take a harder line. Simmering discontent in Central Asia against what is seen as China's imperial hubris makes it easy for ISIS-K to recruit from these regions, Basit added.

ISIS-K follows a Salafi-jihadi Islamic ideology and seeks to establish a caliphate across Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of Iran and India.

While the Afghan Taliban protect fellow ethnic Pashtun militant groups, such as the Pakistani Taliban and the Haqqani network, the ISIS-K is seen as a foreign interloper with fighters as ethnically diverse as Chechens, Uzbeks and Indians.

ISKP, as the group is also known, "seeks to draw a contrast between their fighters and the Taliban, accusing the Taliban of being a Pashtun nationalist movement with a noninterventionist [stance], refusing to use its political influence to help the oppressed Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang," Webber said. "Conversely, by criticizing and threatening China while also conducting attacks against Chinese nationals, ISKP presents itself as the only true Islamic militant vanguard standing up for Muslims in 'East Turkestan,'" as the Uyghurs call their homeland.

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| HEADLINE | 01/26 The Sahel: hotbed of terrorism |
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| SOURCE | https://www.persecution.org/2023/01/26/the-sahel-a-hotbed-of-terrorism/ |
| GIST | <p>01/26/2023 Washington D.C. (International Christian Concern) – The Sahel region of Africa is a belt of land immediately south of the Sahara Desert that stretches east to west across the African continent. The region has garnered global attention due to the rise in extremism over the past decade, in what is now considered an epidemic of jihadism.</p> <p>Mali is known to be the epicenter of the Sahel's insurgency ever since jihadists hijacked a coup attempt in 2012 and established a caliphate. Though French military troops drove out the jihadists just months later, the northern portion of the country has remained a hotbed of terrorism. Many extremist groups call northern Mali their safe haven and continue to train and recruit their militants from there while conducting attacks across borders into Niger and Burkina Faso.</p> <p>In 2021, Burkina Faso experienced a record year of conflict and replaced Mali as the epicenter of Sahel terrorism. On June 4, 2021, the country underwent the bloodiest attack in its six-year struggle with jihadists. Al-Qaeda affiliates killed more than 135 civilians over two nights. Seven months and several attacks later, soldiers staged a coup and announced a military-run government.</p> <p>In Niger, attacks doubled in 2021 compared to 2020. In March 2021, insurgents raided three villages in Niger's Tahoua region, bordering Mali, and massacred 137 civilians. Blamed on affiliates of the Islamic State, the attack followed a January attack that killed 100, as well as an attack weeks earlier which left 58 civilians dead.</p> <p>In addition to Niger, Boko Haram has some presence in Chad and Cameroon. Most of the Boko Haram activity, however, remains in northern Nigeria where they have maintained an insurgency for 13 years. Now split into two factions, Boko Haram seems to be making a comeback after its territory was significantly reduced in 2015, the year it pledged allegiance to Islamic State and created the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP). Boko Haram soldiers, largely forced out of northern Nigeria, entered the lake Chad Basin where weak governance has enabled them to regain strength.</p> |

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| | As jihadists continue to gain momentum throughout the Sahel, they will deepen their influence across borders and claim territory further into Western Africa. If left without international intervention, 2022 is projected to be a year of expansionism for radicals on a quest for global Jihad. |
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| HEADLINE | 01/26 Anti-France sentiment heats up West Africa |
| SOURCE | https://amsterdamnews.com/news/2023/01/26/anti-french-sentiment-boils-over-in-west-africa/ |
| GIST | <p>(GIN) — French flags were set ablaze in the streets of Ouagadougou as hundreds of citizens of the West African nation of Burkina Faso gathered in the capital city over the weekend. Many carried placards with the message: “French army, get out!”</p> <p>Anti-French sentiment has been soaring here, fed by the failure of the French military in the region to protect citizens from jihadist attacks as outlined in a bilateral accord.</p> <p>Burkina Faso, a landlocked country famously known for leading in African art culture and hosting the largest craft market in Africa, has been overrun by extremist groups loosely affiliated with al-Qaida and the Islamic State that have spread in recent years from neighboring Mali and Guinea, where they made incursions about a decade ago.</p> <p>Last week, the Burkinabe government ripped up the five-year-old accord that governed the presence of French armed forces on African territory. The French soldiers were given a month to fully pull out and close the French base.</p> <p>Mohamed Sinon, one of the main leaders of the protestors, said they supported Burkina’s junta Capt. Ibrahim Traoré and the security forces, including the Wagner Group of Russian fighters who have been fighting jihadists in the arid areas of the North.</p> <p>“We want cooperation between Burkina Faso and Russia, but also the strengthening of friendship and of cooperation with Guinea and Mali,” Sinon said.</p> <p>France has some 400 special forces based in Burkina Faso tasked with helping local forces battle the Islamist insurgency that has spread across the Sahel from Mali over the past decade.</p> <p>According to local Burkinabes, the French have done little to stem rising jihadist activity that resulted in thousands killed and more than 2 million displaced—about 10% of the population. The violence has worsened regional food insecurity.</p> <p>This month, some 60 women and girls, including four babies, were abducted while searching for food in an area blockaded by insurgents. On Friday, the military said the captives had been freed.</p> <p>In the country’s North, where the women were abducted, the jihadist groups have prevented trucks carrying food from using roads, forcing residents to venture farther out to get supplies to avoid going hungry.</p> <p>Since becoming the country’s leader, Traoré has said his goal is to recover territories lost to armed groups.</p> <p>Until the recent unrest in the country, Burkina Faso was renowned for its music and its intellectuals, among them Joseph Ki Zerbo, a Burkinabé scholar, historian and writer, recognized as one of Africa’s foremost thinkers in teaching African history at the University of Ouagadougou.</p> <p>Other scholars include Malidoma Patrice Somé, an interpreter of African spirituality, and filmmakers Sarah Bouyain and Fanta Régina Nacro. The best-known in the U.S. is Thomas Sankara, a pan-Africanist and Marxist revolutionary who launched programs for social, ecological, and economic change. He was assassinated in 1987 by troops led by Blaise Compaore.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 US-backed forces attack IS militants Syria |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/kurdish-forces-seize-dozens-suspected-members-syria-96658429 |
| GIST | <p>BEIRUT -- U.S.-backed Kurdish-led fighters in northeastern Syria launched an operation Wednesday against suspected Islamic State militants in the area in retaliation for an attack by the extremist group there last month, according to a statement.</p> <p>Syrian Democratic Forces said they raided “dozens of potential points and hideouts” in the city Raqqa — formerly held by the Islamic State group — and the surrounding area, and arrested dozens of suspected IS members. The U.S.-led coalition forces provided air cover and drone surveillance during the operation, the statement added.</p> <p>The operation was in response to an IS attack on Raqqa in late December that killed six members of the Kurdish-led forces. The SDF also announced formation of a “joint operations room” backed by the international coalition aimed at targeting IS cells.</p> <p>The Kurdish-led forces in Syria regularly carry out joint anti-IS patrols with the U.S.-led coalition . The patrols were temporarily halted late last year when Turkey launched a campaign of airstrikes against Kurdish groups in Syria in retaliation for a deadly November explosion in Istanbul. Ankara blamed Kurdish groups for the attack, an allegation the groups deny.</p> <p>The SDF said that according to its intelligence, IS “is attempting to reorganize the terrorist cells and appointing new leaders” as well as “issuing instructions to move from individual to group terrorist attacks on the prisons” holding IS members.</p> <p>More than 42,400 foreign fighters and some 23,200 Syrians accused of IS ties — and their families — are held in camps and prisons in northeastern Syria, according to a Human Rights Watch report last month.</p> <p>The report detailed dire conditions in the detention facilities and called for repatriation of the detained foreign nationals — most of them women and children — by their countries.</p> <p>Western countries have repatriated an increasing number of their citizens from northeastern Syria, including most recently France, which returned a group of 32 minors and 15 women on Tuesday.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/26 UK: concern over teen far-right extremism |
| SOURCE | https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-64399335 |
| GIST | <p>A rise in teenagers involved with neo-Nazi groups and far-right extremism is "incredibly alarming", a counter-terrorism detective has said.</p> <p>Det Supt Gareth Rees said police could not "arrest our way out of" the issue.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Luca Benincasa, 20, from Cardiff, was jailed after admitting to being a member of a neo-Nazi group.</p> <p>Experts called it a "hugely dangerous time", saying Covid and the cost of living crisis could push more young people towards the far-right.</p> <p>There are also concerns around how the internet is used to share material.</p> <p>"In terms of the ages, we've seen the low teens - and that is an incredibly alarming thing to see," Det Supt Rees said.</p> |

"We have seen people engaged in attack plots, attack planning, looking at attacking locations or individuals.

"But we've also seen significant volumes of offences related to sharing, downloading and sending material, which breaches the terrorism act.

"You've got people who are very young, very impressionable, and very vulnerable who are being drawn into a very worrying area which not only affects their own wellbeing, but also ultimately presents a threat to other people."

Det Supt Rees, the right-wing terrorism lead at Counter Terrorism Policing, said the threat has grown and "evolved" in recent years.

"We need to understand how we can stop young people making decisions and being drawn into an area that is both very sad and very damaging and, ultimately at the top level, very threatening."

Benincasa was sentenced to nine years and three months in prison at Winchester Crown Court in Hampshire on Wednesday for being a "prominent" member of the banned neo-Nazi group Feuerkrieg Division.

He [previously pleaded guilty to terrorism offences](#) after becoming increasingly involved with far-right ideologies during the Covid lockdown.

He held at least 33 one-to-one conversations with potential recruits from across the world, some as young as 14.

A Nazi dagger and documents on how to make explosives and poisons were found by police at his home.

In 2021, [a 16-year-old boy from Cornwall was sentenced](#) after leading the British arm of Feuerkrieg Division.

He downloaded his first bomb-making manual when he was 13, making him one of the UK's youngest terror offenders.

Det Supt Rees said extremists use political, social and economic instability to "push narratives" in conspiracy theories and influence young people.

"If you use Covid as an example, people were more isolated, they didn't have those core networks, whether it be sports, leisure, social, teachers other family networks to challenge some of those views," he said.

The most extreme British neo-Nazi organisation in recent years - National Action - was [co-founded by Alex Davies, from Swansea](#).

Some of its members openly celebrated the [murder of the MP Jo Cox](#).

The organisation used child-like images to target and recruit young people.

Far-right 'like a vulture'

Joe Mulhall spent years undercover exposing neo-Nazi and far-right groups as director of research at anti-fascism organisation, Hope not Hate.

The organisation played a crucial role in [preventing the murder of Labour MP Rosie Cooper by neo-Nazi Jack Renshaw](#).

He believes young people no longer have to search for extreme, hateful content online - rather, it comes to them.

"They're shockingly young, 13 or 14, and they're involved in very extreme, explicitly overt terrorist behaviour, and those numbers are just increasing," he said.

Mr Mulhall said young people were "networking and discussing race war, discussing overt terrorism, in a way that was just much rarer a few years ago".

He said young people were now bombarded online with a "grab-bag" of hateful ideologies.

"Now, you can sit in a bedroom anywhere in the world and at the click of a button you can come across extreme far-right material, you can consume holocaust denial books, anti-Muslim books, terrorist manuals," he said.

"The hurdles for getting involved that would have often prohibited young people from being able to get into far-right groups traditionally just aren't there anymore - and you can do it anonymously.

"It can just pop up on your timeline."

Experts are concerned that people who first engaged with the far-right during the pandemic are now susceptible to their narratives around the cost-of-living crisis.

Dr Lella Nouri, a leading expert on the far-right, said "uncertainty breeds extremism".

"I suppose with the financial crisis we are in that situation right now," she said.

Dr Nouri, a senior lecturer in criminology at Swansea University, said the confusion and lack of information around Covid played into the hands of the far-right and was a powerful tool to push their message.

"The world was in chaos, Wales was in chaos, the UK was in chaos, and at points of chaos there's uncertainty.

"And when we have uncertainty we look for answers, and the far-right were very quickly the ones to give those answers. False answers."

Dr Nouri said the far-right were now capitalising on the cost-of-living crisis and the financial difficulties people are facing.

"Certain communities are more vulnerable, specifically those who feel disillusioned, whether that be because of financial pressures, lack of employment or maybe where they've just sort of ended up in life," she said."

British counter terrorism police have said it is a "significant challenge" to sift through the huge volume of extremist content online and spot what could turn into an attack.

Det Supt Rees said the internet was an "exceptionally significant" tool for the far-right.

He added that he was keen to stress the important role local police and the public played in preventing children from being drawn into extremism.

"It's not just working with policing alone, it's a strong relationship between counter-terrorism policing experts, local policing and communities.

"You kind of need all those pillars to work together."

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 WA plan to fight domestic extremism |
| SOURCE | https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-a-washington-state-plan-to-fight-domestic-extremism-could-be-a-model-for-the-nation |
| GIST | <p>In Washington state this week, legislators held public hearings to form a domestic violent extremism commission that, if implemented, would make Washington the first in the nation to target extremism with a public health and civic engagement approach. Laura Barrón-López spoke with Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson about what his state is doing and how it could be a model for the nation.</p> <p>Read the Full Transcript</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geoff Bennett: Four members of the far right anti-government group the Oath Keepers were convicted of seditious conspiracy this week for their role in the January 6 insurrection, once again shining a light on the dangerous rise of domestic extremism in America. Laura Barrón-López looks at what one state is doing to combat those forces and how it could be a model for the nation. Laura Barrón-López: In Washington state this week, legislators held public hearings to form a domestic violent extremism commission that, if implemented, would make Washington the first in the nation to target extremism with a public health and civic engagement approach. The state attorney general's office authored the study that recommends the commission and other steps to prevent domestic terrorism and hate crimes. Here to discuss that effort is the attorney general, Bob Ferguson. Attorney General, thanks for joining us. This report was in response to the rise in white supremacy and domestic extremism in your state and across the country. Washington ranks fifth in the country for white supremacist incidents. What actions are you recommending that your state take? Bob Ferguson, Washington State Attorney General: |

Yes, thanks so much for having me on, Laura, on this important subject. I appreciate it. So in a nutshell, after a very detailed report that my team has put together in talking to a lot of experts around the country, the recommendations are first and foremost to create that commission that you mentioned at the outset, a commission that is specifically focused on this issue.

And that's not something we have seen around the country with other states. It's really one takeaway from this report is, I think it's appropriate for states to take a more active role on addressing domestic violent extremism. And this commission can put forth recommendations to really address this challenge here in Washington state.

- **Laura Barrón-López:**

You define in the report, you define domestic violent extremism as including extremist and political violence. That includes online disinformation. It includes extremist recruitment, anti-government ideologies.

But in a public hearing this week that you held in response to this potential commission being built, there was some criticism in your state about that broad definition of domestic violent extremism.

- **Lara Gabriel, Washington:**

This Orwellian bill would cause Washingtonians, including parents, nurses, doctors, and vulnerable and marginalized communities, to be afraid of expressing their opinions or of speaking misinformation, for fear of being labeled or penalized as a domestic violence extremist.

- **Laura Barrón-López:**

What's your response to that concern?

- **Bob Ferguson:**

Yes.

Well, of course, we have public hearings for a reason, to hear all voices. And our state legislature is no different than any state legislature. We have all sorts of voices at the table. Our response is pretty straightforward.

Our report is very clear that we think a definition of domestic terrorism at the federal level is a useful starting point. But it focuses strictly on sort of threats of bodily harm, of killing somebody, for example, which, from our perspective, is simply too narrow for the great threat that we see with the increase of radicalization, for example.

So we're trying to broaden that term to address things that are not specifically a threat to somebody, but where the state can take some action in prevention, for example, take a more holistic approach, a public health approach, to address what we all see and know is happening in communities all across the country. So, we appreciate the feedback. But we think that feedback is a bit of an exaggeration, to put it mildly.

- **Laura Barrón-López:**

And then you also recommend a more public health approach, one that's led by the community and by different community institutions.

What does that look in practice, though?

- **Bob Ferguson:**

Yes, so the way to think of this — and it's fairly detailed — but, at a high level, up to this point, as a nation, really, we have addressed this type of extremism from a law enforcement standpoint, to criminalize folks who engage in that behavior, which is, of course, entirely appropriate.

Those folks need to be held accountable. What we're trying to get at is something a little bit different, to broaden the scope, look at it from a public health standpoint, because that is what it is. We should view this holistically.

Let's engage in prevention, of getting folks — avoiding them being radicalized in the first place. If somebody is radicalized, and wants removal, move away from that, how can we help them with counseling, for example, to get them away from that ideology?

So, looking at from a more holistic standpoint, we think, addresses prevention, addresses helping folks who've been radicalized and take a more holistic view of this to address what is a huge challenge, not just in Washington state, but all across the country.

- **Laura Barrón-López:**

On radicalization specifically, you mentioned that looking at social media and the role of social media and online disinformation in radicalizing people.

And in many of these recent cases of violent extremism, including in the case of the Oath Keepers that were just found guilty of seditious conspiracy, these aren't young men. These are men in their 40s, 50s, even in their 60s. Usually, when we talk about harmful content on social media, we're talking about how it impacts younger people, impressionable young people.

So how do you prevent older citizens from being drawn into these alt-right conspiracy theory groups, like the Oath Keepers or anti-government groups?

- **Bob Ferguson:**

You raise a really good point, Laura, right, about the large number of folks in our community, not simply young people, who are impacted by this.

And that's what creating a commission is all about. We'd be the first state to create the commission that you mentioned at the outset. And that would bring together experts to engage on making specific recommendations on exactly this kind of issue. What can we do to prevent the radicalization of folks who are a bit older, as you said, their 40s, their 50s, their 60s, and help them to get out of that if they are radicalized.

So, there are all sorts of things that experts have recommended in this area. Our goal is to create that commission. Our report is a first step. Now let's move to creating the commission, get experts together who can put together a plan for the entire state of Washington, working with community members to make recommendations to really address exactly that type of challenge that we see all across the country every time it seems we pick up the newspaper.

- **Laura Barrón-López:**

And, lastly, Attorney General, I did want to ask you about the mass shooting in California in Monterey Park.

It has caused a lot of fear among the Asian American community. And you specifically cite that there has been a rise among — a fear among the Asian American community in Washington state as well due to hate crimes.

How specifically would your domestic violent extremism plan address hate crimes?

- **Bob Ferguson:**

Well, it's going to address hate crimes because that's one piece of what we're seeing all across the country, but especially a rise in Washington state.

So we have engaged in putting into this report with communities the Asian American community and many others in our state to see what they're experiencing and what recommendations we can put together

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| | <p>to really address this in a more holistic fashion. That's but one example of what we see all around the country and what this commission, if put in place by our state legislature, will be able to grapple with and make specific recommendations, and working with the community to do so.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laura Barrón-López: Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson, thank you so much for your time. • Bob Ferguson: Thank you. Appreciate it. |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Guilty plea: mailing ricin to president |
| SOURCE | https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/foreign-national-pleads-guilty-to-mailing-ricin-to-president-of-the-united-states-in-2020/ |
| GIST | <p>A dual citizen of Canada and France pleaded guilty today to sending a threatening letter containing homemade ricin to then-President Donald J. Trump at the White House in September 2020, and eight similar letters, each containing ricin, to Texas State law enforcement officials.</p> <p>According to court documents, Pascale Cecile Veronique Ferrier, 55, admitted in the plea agreements that she made ricin at her residence in Quebec, Canada, in September 2020. Ricin is a deadly poison made from castor beans. Ferrier placed the ricin in envelopes containing letters she wrote to then-President Trump at the White House and to eight Texas State law enforcement officials.</p> <p>Ferrier was detained in the State of Texas for around 10 weeks in the spring of 2019, and she believed that the law enforcement officials were connected to her period of detention. In early September 2020, Ferrier used the Twitter social media service to propose that someone should “please shoot [T]rump in the face.” The letters in the envelopes contained threatening language, and the letter addressed to then-President Trump instructed him to “[g]ive up and remove [his] application for this election.” Ferrier mailed each of the threatening ricin letters from Canada to the United States. Ferrier then drove a car from Canada to the Peace Bridge Border Crossing in Buffalo, New York, on Sept. 20, 2020, where border patrol officials found her in possession of a loaded firearm, hundreds of rounds of ammunition and other weapons.</p> <p>Ferrier pleaded guilty to prohibitions with respect to biological weapons before the Honorable Dabney L. Friedrich of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. Ferrier also pleaded guilty to eight additional violations of prohibitions with respect to biological weapons in a case brought against her in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas, and consented to the transfer of that case to the District of Columbia for plea and sentencing.</p> <p>The Honorable Dabney L. Friedrich scheduled the sentencing hearing for April 26. Ferrier will be sentenced to 262 months of imprisonment if the court accepts the plea agreements. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Spain: machete attacks at churches |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/25/machete-attacks-at-spanish-churches-leave-one-dead-and-four-wounded |
| GIST | <p>A machete-wielding man killed a sexton and wounded a priest in attacks at two churches in the Spanish city of Algeciras on Wednesday before being arrested, in what authorities are investigating as a possible act of terrorism.</p> <p>The suspect was arrested and is in the custody of Spain’s national police. The ministry did not identify him.</p> |

The attacks began around 7pm when the armed man went into the San Isidro church and assaulted a priest, who was seriously wounded.

The assailant then went to a second church, the Nuestra Señora de La Palma – a five-minute walk away – where he continued his rampage, assaulting the sexton. The sexton, whose job it is to take care of the church and its maintenance, fled outside where the attacker dealt him the mortal wounds in a public square.

The Algeciras town hall identified the sexton as Diego Valencia and the wounded priest as Antonio Rodríguez. The town hall said Rodríguez had been hospitalised and was in a stable condition.

Local media reported that at least three other people had been wounded.

Spain's national court said a judge has opened an investigation into a possible act of terrorism.

Police are investigating the incident, the interior ministry said, to determine the "nature of the attack". It offered no further detail on the attacker's possible motive.

The secretary general of Spain's Episcopal Conference, Francisco García, wrote on Twitter: "I have received the news of the incident in Algeciras with great pain."

"These are sad moments of suffering, we are united by the pain of families of the victims and for the diocese of Cádiz," he added.

Algeciras is near the southern tip of Spain, across the bay from Gibraltar. It is home to an important port with ferry connections to northern Africa.

The town hall has declared a day of mourning; flags will fly at half mast.

"We are all stunned by these acts, which have filled us with pain," Mayor José Landaluce said. "Algeciras has always been a city where concord and tolerance reign, despite incidents like this that create an image that does not correspond to reality."

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Spain police: arrest in letter bomb case |
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| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/25/world/europe/letter-bombs-spain-arrest.html |
| GIST | <p>The Spanish Interior Ministry said on Wednesday that the police had arrested a 74-year-old man on suspicion of carrying out a recent letter bomb campaign, which U.S. officials have said was intended to signal how Russia and its proxies could carry out terrorist strikes in NATO member states.</p> <p>The arrest of the man, a Spanish citizen, comes days after American and European officials said they believed that Russian military intelligence officers had directed associates of a white supremacist militant group based in Russia to carry out the attacks.</p> <p>Investigators have focused in recent weeks on the Russian Imperial Movement, a group that has members and associates across Europe, according to the U.S. officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivities around the inquiry.</p> <p>The officials added that the group, which has been designated a global terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department, is believed to have ties to Russian intelligence agencies.</p> <p>According to a statement from the Interior Ministry, the Spanish authorities believe that the man who was arrested made and sent all of the six letter bombs himself, though the "participation or influence of other people" was not ruled out. The statement made no mention of any link between the man, who police investigators said had "technical and computer knowledge," and either far-right groups or the Russian government.</p> |

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| | <p>The letter bombs were all sent from the northeastern Spanish city of Burgos, the main city in the region of Burgos where the man was arrested, the statement said.</p> <p>The letter bombs were sent in late November and early December to sites mostly in Madrid, including Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's official residence, which also serves as his office; the American and Ukrainian embassies; and the Spanish Defense Ministry.</p> <p>No one was killed in the attacks, which U.S. officials consider terrorism. An employee of the Ukrainian Embassy was injured when one of the packages exploded.</p> <p>The apparent aim of the action, according to the U.S. officials, was to signal that Russia and its proxies could carry out terrorist strikes across Europe, including in the capitals of member states of NATO, which is helping defend Ukraine against Russia's invasion. Spain is a member of the alliance and has given hundreds of millions of dollars in military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, as well as diplomatic support.</p> <p>One of the letter bombs was also sent to Instalaza, a weapons manufacturer in Zaragoza, northeastern Spain. Instalaza makes grenade launchers provided to Ukraine by the Spanish government.</p> <p>U.S. officials said that the Russian officers who directed the campaign appeared to be intent on keeping European governments off guard and may be testing out proxy groups to carry out such attacks.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Nigeria: restive region AQ, IS militants |
| SOURCE | https://www.africanews.com/2023/01/25/11-terrorists-killed-6-arrested-nigerien-army/ |
| GIST | <p>Niger's army on Tuesday (Jan. 24) said it had killed 11 "terrorists" and captured six last week in a restive region plagued by insurgents linked with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group.</p> <p>Operations in the western Tillaberi region near Burkina Faso also saw weapons seized and more than 130 motorcycles destroyed, Niger's defence ministry said in its weekly bulletin.</p> <p>Tillaberi is in the vast and unstable "three borders" region between Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, where jihadist insurgents have carried out attacks for years.</p> <p>The West African nation has launched offensive operations against jihadists in the area, recently with the backing of 250 soldiers from former colonial power France.</p> <p>The anti-jihadist force Niya, which has been deployed in western Niger since February last year and has more than 2,000 personnel, suffered two injuries in the operations, the army said.</p> <p>The army added that it had dismantled a fuel-trafficking network suspected of supplying the armed groups.</p> <p>Niger is facing jihadist insurgencies on its western border with Mali and Burkina Faso and on its southeastern frontier with Nigeria.</p> <p>The Sahel state is home to tens of thousands of internally displaced people, as well as refugees from Nigeria, Mali and Burkina Faso.</p> <p>Almost 10,000 people from Niger villages located near Burkina Faso were forced to move to the town of Tera in November and December last year, according to the United Nations.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Nigeria: drone strike kills 21 |
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| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/witnesses-drone-strike-kills-21-civilians-north-nigeria-96665412 |
| GIST | <p>ABUJA, Nigeria -- A weapon fired from the air in Nigeria killed at least 21 members of a civilian defense group as they responded to an attack by gunmen in the country's volatile north, witnesses said Wednesday.</p> <p>Authorities have not said who was responsible for the strike, which residents described as coming from a drone. It took place in Niger state, one of Nigeria's most insecure areas despite its close proximity to the capital, Abuja.</p> <p>Ayuba Lagodo, a member of the civilian defense group that tries to protect villagers, said a drone strike hit shortly after residents reported an attack under way in Galadimakogo. Such defense groups are common in Nigeria's north, where many hot spots of violence have an inadequate official security presence.</p> <p>At least 21 people were confirmed dead after Tuesday's strike. Lagodo said the death toll would likely rise because many people were critically wounded or unaccounted for.</p> <p>While it wasn't clear who launched the drone, blame quickly fell on the Nigeria Air Force, which has carried out similar strikes in recent years.</p> <p>Federal police in Niger state told The Associated Press on Wednesday that a military operation had been conducted in the state. However, spokespeople for the Nigerian Air Force and Nigeria's Defense Headquarters have yet to respond to media inquiries.</p> <p>Two state government officials have started to investigate the incident, said Mary Noel-Berge, chief press secretary to Niger's governor.</p> <p>Military air raids are common in Nigeria, where an Islamist insurgency in the northeast and violent attacks by armed groups in the northwest and central regions have overstretched the country's armed forces.</p> <p>In 2017, more than 100 people were killed when a refugee camp was mistakenly bombed. Some Nigerian army soldiers died in 2021 after a fighter jet that security forces said was targeting extremists bombed their truck.</p> <p>“‘Accidental’ strikes are very rampant in Nigeria. One of the things we can attribute this to is faulty intel,” Confidence MacHarry, a security analyst with the Lagos-based SBM Intelligence security firm, said.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 France: troops out Burkina Faso in a month |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/french-troops-withdraw-burkina-faso-month-96668005 |
| GIST | <p>PARIS -- France's foreign ministry said Wednesday that French troops deployed to fight extremists in Burkina Faso will withdraw within a month following a demand by the country's military rulers — which came after a similar move from neighboring Mali.</p> <p>A top official at the foreign ministry said France has formally received from Burkina Faso a decision to terminate the 2018 agreement on the presence of French troops in the country.</p> <p>“We will respect the terms of this agreement” which provides that the decision takes effect a month after the written notification, the official said, requesting anonymity in line with the French government's customary practices.</p> <p>About 400 French special forces members are based in Burkina Faso as part of a broader military deployment aimed at fighting extremists in Africa's Sahel region.</p> |

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| | <p>Anti-French sentiment has grown in Burkina Faso, a former French colony, since junta leader Ibrahim Traore seized power in September. Traore has been more overtly open to working with other countries, notably Russia.</p> <p>Protesters took to the streets of the capital Ouagadougou this month to call for the ouster of the French ambassador and the closure of a French military base north of the capital.</p> <p>The move by Burkina Faso's regime comes five months after France completed its withdrawal from Mali after nine years fighting Islamic extremists alongside regional troops. Many of those are now based in Niger and Chad instead.</p> <p>About 3,000 French soldiers are deployed in the Sahel region.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Eastern Congo: market bomb injures 12 |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/bomb-injures-12-people-market-congo-96673372 |
| GIST | <p>KINSHASA, Congo -- A bomb exploded at a market in eastern Congo on Wednesday, injuring at least a dozen people, authorities said.</p> <p>An unknown person detonated a bomb inside a bag in North Kivu's Beni town, said Tharcisse Katembo, a local official.</p> <p>"Damage was documented (and) at least 12 people were injured. They were injured in the lower limbs, others in their upper limbs and others were hit in the head," he told reporters in Beni.</p> <p>The victims were taken to the hospital and an investigation was underway, Katembo said.</p> <p>No one claimed responsibility for the bomb. However, attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces, which is believed to be linked with the Islamic State extremist movement, have been increasing in North Kivu, according to the United Nations.</p> <p>Earlier this month, at least 14 people were killed and dozens injured in an attack on a church in Kasindi town, which was claimed by Islamic State. It said in its Amaq news outlet that it planted an explosive device inside the church and detonated it while people were praying.</p> <p>Since April, attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces have killed at least 370 civilians, and the group has abducted several hundred more, including a significant number of children, the U.N. says.</p> <p>The explosion Wednesday occurred in a local market next to a cassava mill, witnesses said.</p> <p>Danny Syaghuswa, 16, said he was sitting on his motorcycle when a man in a striped shirt put a small bag behind a door, saying he would come back for it, according to an interview with local reporters heard by The Associated Press. "Less than five minutes after he left the bomb exploded," Syaghuswa said.</p> <p>Images of the attack circulating on chat groups show bloodied people lying on the floor. One woman in blood-stained clothes was carrying a small child.</p> <p>Violence has wracked eastern Congo for decades as more than 120 armed groups and self-defense militias fight for land and power. Nearly 6 million people are internally displaced, and hundreds of thousands are facing extreme food insecurity, according to the United Nations.</p> |
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Suspicious, Unusual

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Eggs absurdly expensive |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/25/18-a-dozen-how-did-americas-eggs-get-absurdly-expensive |
| GIST | <p>The egg carton has become the symbol of inflation. By the end of 2022, prices had shot up 60% year-over-year putting a strain on holiday budgeting for households across the country.</p> <p>Some Americans got creative with their sourcing. Attempts to smuggle eggs across the US-Mexico border have surged, US Border Patrol says, with the agency reporting that the number of egg and poultry seizures rose 108% from 1 October to 31 December. Shoppers are also seeking out local farms, which can be cheaper. Egg farmers on TikTok have poked fun at this boon, calling themselves “egg dealers”, weighing their produce as if it were a kilo of drugs.</p> <p>On Tuesday on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, one of the most expensive neighborhoods in America, prices remained steep. At Eli’s Market, a gourmet grocery store, a dozen organic eggs cost between \$12.99 and \$17.99. “Really?!” said one shopper after learning the price. “That’s nuts.” A store manager declined to comment.</p> <p>A few blocks away, prices were lower, but still well above what customers are used to. Maria Tripodis, a home chef, perused cartons of one dozen eggs that ranged from \$7.49 to \$9.99. “These are nice eggs, but they’re a lot more expensive than usual,” she said.</p> <p>There are signs that things might be turning around. The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service promises an end is in sight: as of 20 January, loose egg prices have declined by 52% from their high the week of 18 December. But in the stores that I visited, that decline was not translating into lower prices for the consumer.</p> <p>The American Egg Board has blamed the price rise on an unprecedented outbreak of H1N1, a particularly virulent strain of avian flu that has a near 100% fatality rate among birds. This reduction in supply of egg-laying birds has sent prices soaring. But one farmer-advocacy group accuses major egg producers of gouging prices in a “collusive scheme” aimed at increasing profits.</p> <p>The group, called Farm Action, examined publicly available financial data from the egg industry. In a letter calling on the FTC to investigate record prices, Farm Action determined that the avian flu outbreak had only had an “apparently mild impact on the industry”, generally lowering the average size of an egg-laying flock by no more than 6% compared with 2021.</p> <p>“Egg prices in the grocer store have on average tripled for consumers since last year,” said Angela Huffman, Farm Action’s co-founder and vice-president. “Dominant egg corporations are blaming inflation and avian flu for price hikes, but if they were only raising prices to cover this cost, why are they raking in fivefold product margins? ”</p> <p>Farm Action’s investigation began with an analysis by the USDA, which noted that the industry had not taken the proper steps to increase flock sizes and replace birds lost to avian flu.</p> <p>“The only answer is that companies are working together to capitalize on these convenient excuses, using avian flu and inflation to set higher prices for the consumer,” said Huffman.</p> <p>The threat of avian flu was real, she noted, but it “doesn’t justify” price gouging. “But the companies are really pushing this narrative.”</p> <p>Farm Action has called on the FTC to investigate the egg producers, which could force a restitution payment that would see customers awarded money back for their purchases. Farm Action has forwarded the letter to the Department of Justice and the USDA, to encourage them to help the FTC enforce antitrust laws. “Everybody is really struggling right now, and I think it’s really cruel for these companies to take advantage of the American people in this way,” Huffman said.</p> |

Max P Bowman, vice-president and CFO of Cal-Maine, the country's largest egg supplier, denies these claims. He issued a statement referring to the USDA's division of animal and plant health inspection, which reported that there were 306 million layer hens for table or market type eggs as of 1 January, down 6% from a year earlier.

"In addition, like all other industries, egg production is being affected by increased input costs," Bowman's statement read. "In particular, the cost of feed, labor, fuel and packaging have risen considerably, which affects the cost of production, and therefore wholesale and retail prices of eggs."

Whether or not prices are not being inflated by wholesalers, it's grocery stores that will ultimately determine the cost.

At delis and corner stores I visited, prices were cheaper than supermarkets but still would have been unimaginable just a year ago, ranging from \$6.90 to \$8.99 a dozen. John Philips, who owns the longstanding Mansion Diner, said that demand for omelets and other egg dishes was still high, despite a recent price increase.

"It doesn't stop people from ordering breakfast, but it will turn a five-day-a-week customer into a four-day-a-week-customer, or a three-day-a-week-customer," he said.

Philips said his restaurant called five companies on a daily basis for egg prices, which they purchase in thirty cases of a dozen eggs each. "We've seen everything from \$85 to \$165," he said. "That's a huge swing. At some points, we're able to get a cheaper egg from an organic farm in upstate New York than we were from a wholesale market. It shouldn't have to be that way, but I'll take it."

He and his staff frequently switch suppliers. "It's complicated," he said. "I sell cheeseburgers for a living, and I have to think like an economist now when I buy my **** eggs."

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Record signups for health insurance plans |
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| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/25/us/politics/obamacare-enrollment.html |
| GIST | <p>WASHINGTON — A record 16.3 million Americans have signed up for health insurance plans through the Affordable Care Act's marketplaces during this year's open enrollment period, beating last year's sign-ups by 13 percent, the Biden administration said on Wednesday.</p> <p>The growing enrollment follows the passage of legislation during the coronavirus pandemic to increase federal subsidies for people buying the plans — substantially lowering prices for nearly every American who buys their own insurance. Around 3.6 million people selected plans in the Obamacare marketplaces who did not receive coverage through them last year. Last year's total had been the highest in the law's history.</p> <p>President Biden cheered the development in a statement, saying, "Today, we received further proof that our efforts are delivering record-breaking results."</p> <p>The Biden administration has taken other steps to encourage enrollment in the plans, including increasing advertising and enrollment assistance and providing a longer window for sign-ups than during President Donald J. Trump's administration. But it appears the money is mattering more than anything else.</p> <p>"The No. 1 reason the Affordable Care Act has worked — and is now working better — is it is affordable," said Peter V. Lee, a senior scholar at Stanford University who ran California's marketplace for a decade. "Affordability is the biggest thing."</p> |

There was ample evidence during Obamacare's earlier years that the price of health plans remained a major barrier for Americans. People qualified for subsidies on a sliding scale according to their income, and under the original formula, the remaining premiums proved a barrier for many low-income households.

For a family of four earning more than around \$110,000, there was no federal assistance available at all, saddling many with extremely high insurance prices. The cheapest plans also often came with high deductibles and a limited selection of doctors.

Frustrations with the cost of coverage helped fuel a political backlash to the Affordable Care Act that culminated with an effort by Mr. Trump and congressional Republicans to repeal the law in 2017. But Republican lawmakers were unable to agree on a program to replace the law that could win majority support in the Senate.

Under the new policies enacted during the pandemic, which were renewed through 2025 in the climate, tax and health care bill passed last year, subsidies increased at every level of income.

Americans earning less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level — around \$42,000 for a family of four — are eligible for free health plans that come with low deductibles and co-payments. Before the change, many such people could get free plans on the Obamacare marketplaces, but only with very high deductibles. This year, there were particularly large increases in sign-ups in Texas, [Florida](#), Georgia and North Carolina — states with large low-income populations that have not expanded Medicaid, suggesting the new subsidies are driving the change.

“It speaks to the power of free, but also free plans that are actually attractive,” said Cynthia Cox, who directs the Kaiser Family Foundation's program on the Affordable Care Act. The foundation has been tracking the [millions of low-income Americans](#) who were eligible for coverage under the law but remained uninsured. Last year, that number fell substantially, and Ms. Cox said it would most likely fall again once new data on the uninsured rate is published.

Americans with incomes higher than four times the poverty level became eligible for subsidies for the first time as a result of the pandemic stimulus bill that Mr. Biden signed into law in 2021. Though this higher-earning group, often made up of the self-employed and early retirees, represented a relatively small share of the nation's uninsured population, there is evidence that they represent a growing share of those covered by Obamacare plans.

The strong enrollment and improved political stability of the Affordable Care Act have helped make the marketplaces a more attractive place for insurance companies to do business. Several years ago, [many insurers pulled out](#) of the markets, but since Republicans tried and failed to repeal the Affordable Care Act in 2017, the plans have largely come back. More than 90 percent of people who signed up for this year had a choice among at least three insurance companies, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

“That really has become an important and much more stable market,” said Matt Eyles, the president and chief executive of AHIP, the insurance industry's largest trade group.

Last year, the Biden administration eliminated [a longstanding barrier](#) to subsidies for the family members of Americans who get insurance at work for themselves but not for their relatives. The change was estimated to affect more than five million Americans, a vast majority of whom were already insured through other means.

But while some of the enrollment in Affordable Care Act plans may reflect people shifting from other types of coverage, it appears that many of the new enrollees had no insurance before. The uninsured rate declined last year amid increased Obamacare enrollment, though a pandemic policy that [requires extended Medicaid coverage](#) by states probably also played a significant role.

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| | <p>The end of that policy is coming, and Mr. Lee said the robust sign-ups and the Biden administration's stewardship of the marketplaces made him confident that many of the people who would lose coverage when their Medicaid plans expire would be able to transition into marketplace plans later this year, a shift that could increase enrollment even further.</p> <p>The numbers announced on Wednesday are not final. Some states that run their own marketplaces are continuing to let consumers sign up for plans for this year. Some people also drop their insurance after initially signing up, so it will take a few months for final enrollment numbers to become clear.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Residents in WA deficient in vitamin D? |
| SOURCE | https://www.krem.com/article/news/health/washingtonians-suffer-major-vitamin-d-deficiencies-spokane/293-21aa6540-956d-47ec-87ef-7ede98a76880 |
| GIST | <p>SPOKANE, Wash. — According to DrugGenius.com, Washingtonians are extremely deficient in Vitamin D.</p> <p>Vitamin D was the most searched supplement on the internet by Washington residents.</p> <p>According to the study, Vitamin D became an increasingly popular search during the pandemic when people were inside their homes and getting less sunlight.</p> <p>Vitamin D, also known as the 'sunshine vitamin,' can be found in oily fish, egg yolks, cheese and beef liver. The vitamin helps the body absorb calcium and phosphorous which are important for bone building.</p> <p>Studies have also shown that Vitamin D is helpful in reducing cancer cell growth and helps control infection and inflammation within the body.</p> <p>If someone lacks Vitamin D, it can result in muscle weakness, muscle aches, muscle cramps and fatigue. Washington isn't alone in their need for the important vitamin. 43 other states also are deficient in Vitamin D.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 WA national parks awarded record \$1.1M |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/record-1-1-million-awarded-to-wa-national-parks/ |
| GIST | <p>Washington's National Park Fund on Wednesday awarded a record-setting \$1.1 million to Mount Rainier, North Cascades and Olympic National Parks.</p> <p>The money will fund 42 priority projects at Washington's three national parks in 2023, according to WNPF.</p> <p>Each year, park superintendents and leadership teams select priority projects for their respective parks, which fall into four core areas: advancing science and research, improving visitors' experiences, expanding volunteerism and stewardship and embracing inclusion.</p> <p>Mount Rainier National Park received \$630,768, which will fund projects like Wonderland Trail improvements and maintenance, development of an online accessible trails guide, aquatic surveys and restoration and the park's 200 Meadow Rover volunteers, who patrol alpine trails to teach visitors about land stewardship, WNPF said.</p> <p>The park will receive an additional \$144,212 when it is ready to implement additional programs, according to WNPF.</p> <p>North Cascades National Park received \$114,225 for projects like rare carnivore research, digitization of the 1963 North Cascades Study Commission photographs that built the case for protecting the land as a</p> |

national park, the Adopt a Whitebark Pine project and an innovative food sustainability and native plant education program in partnership with local tribes, according to WNPF.

WNPF will award an additional \$179,449 when North Cascades National Park is ready to add further programming.

Olympic National Park received \$385,771 to fund projects including the development of a Native Conservation Corps program by youth members of the Quileute Tribe, the Terminus glacier memorial project, the Adventures in Your Big Backyard youth program and elk monitoring in the [Hoh Rain Forest](#), according to WNPF.

WNPF will award an additional \$57,773 when the park is ready to implement additional programs.

"It's quite remarkable yet not surprising based on the generosity of our donors that we were able to fund nearly every project our three park partners requested funds for," said Laurie Ward, CEO of WNPF, in a news release.

WNPF raises funds through donations from individual and corporate donors, stock and estate gifts, contributions from park lodge guest donation programs, foundation grants, events, [fundraising climbs](#) and [the statewide national park license plate program](#), according to WNPF.

"I'm proud to say that [we] ended the year with an additional \$380,000 on hand to distribute to the parks when they're ready to implement additional programs — all thanks to our thousands of supporters and partners," Ward said.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Asteroid extreme close approach to Earth |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/asteroid-make-extremely-close-approach-earth-week/story?id=96675561 |
| GIST | <p>An asteroid the size of a box truck is slated to get very close to Earth this week, according to scientists.</p> <p>But don't be alarmed, it isn't projected to make an impact and cause Armageddon, NASA said.</p> <p>The asteroid, 2023 BU, will pass by the planet over the southern tip of South America around 7:27 p.m. Thursday and be 2,200 miles above the Earth's surface, NASA said. The asteroid will be well within the orbit of geosynchronous satellites, according to the agency.</p> <p>Davide Farnocchia, a navigation engineer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory who developed the agency's Scout impact hazard assessment system, said in a statement that even though this comet's approach is very close to the planet, Scout ruled out 2023 BU as one that would make an impact.</p> <p>"In fact, this is one of the closest approaches by a known near-Earth object ever recorded," he said in a statement.</p> <p>The asteroid was discovered four days ago by amateur astronomer Gennadiy Borisov, from his MARGO observatory in Nauchnyi, Crimea, NASA said. Other agencies and labs analyzed the data and made more observations to come up with the asteroid's path and description.</p> <p>The object is estimated to be 11.5 to 28 feet across.</p> <p>NASA noted that even if the asteroid did impact Earth it "would turn into a fireball and largely disintegrate harmlessly in the atmosphere, with some of the bigger debris potentially falling as small meteorites."</p> <p>The agency did note that 2023 BU will come so close to the Earth that its path around the sun will be altered by the planet's gravity.</p> |

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| | "After its encounter, the asteroid's orbit will be more elongated, moving it out to about halfway between Earth's and Mars' orbits at its farthest point from the sun," NASA said in a statement. |
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Crime, Criminals

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| HEADLINE | 01/26 Major cities auto thefts, carjackings spike |
| SOURCE | https://www.cbsnews.com/news/auto-thefts-carjackings-major-u-s-cities-spike-new-report/ |
| GIST | <p>Motor vehicle thefts across 30 major cities have increased by 59% from 2019 to 2022, spiking amid the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new analysis of crime trends released Thursday by the Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ).</p> <p>The data also showed motor vehicle theft more than doubled in eight of the 30 cities surveyed amid the pandemic. It tripled in Memphis and Chicago.</p> <p>"For decades, motor vehicle thefts had been plummeting. Certainly from the early '90s through the beginning of the pandemic, they were way down," said Dr. Richard Rosenfeld, a criminologist at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and author of the CCJ study. "That's because, quite simply, it became more and more difficult to steal a car. Newer model cars were accompanied by electronic ignition and locking systems, plus GPS systems."</p> <p>But, according to Rosenfeld, that downward trend began reversing "right at the start" of the pandemic. "That has persisted through the end of 2022 with no sign of letting up," he added.</p> <p>The number of motor vehicle thefts was a combined 37,560 higher across 30 cities in 2022 than the year before, according to the CCJ report.</p> <p>The latest deep dive into national crime trends drew on data from 35 cities nationwide, including Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. The new study from CCJ examined monthly rates for 10 violent, property, and drug offenses, though not every city reported data on all crimes. In the case of homicides, 27 cities published numbers publicly.</p> <p><i>Here's a breakdown of the new report's top takeaways.</i></p> <p>Carjackings increased by 29% amid the pandemic</p> <p>In 2020, Americans suffered \$7.4 billion in losses due to motor vehicle theft, according to the FBI. According to the CCJ, "added to these direct costs are the costs of other crimes, such as robberies, burglaries, and drive-by shootings, that motor vehicle thefts help to facilitate."</p> <p>While motor vehicle thefts decreased dramatically from a rate of 659 per 100,000 population in 1991, to 246 per 100,000 in 2020, the onset of the pandemic saw a quick reversal.</p> <p>"For decades, motor vehicle theft rates had been plummeting. Motor vehicle death rates had been plummeting," said Rosenfeld. "Certainly from the early 1990s through the beginning of the pandemic, they were way down."</p> <p>What changed? Rosenfeld said he does not have a "good, definitive answer" to that question yet, but calls the uptick "emblematic of contemporary urban crime."</p> <p>According to the report, the number of carjackings — defined as theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle by force or threat — increased from 3,000 in 2020 to 3,713 in 2022 across seven cities: Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Memphis, Norfolk and San Francisco.</p> <p>Data from the city of Chicago suggest that most citywide carjackers are young adults, although the share of carjackings by juveniles more than doubled, from 18% to 41%, between 2016 and 2021.</p> |

Rosenberg also noted that "while carjacking is technically a form of robbery, robbery rates fell during the pandemic while carjacking increased."

"Two distinct increases in vehicle theft are discernible since early 2020," the report detailed, "an initial rise at the beginning of the pandemic and a much sharper increase in the spring of 2022."

According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau, [there were more than](#) 936,000 vehicle thefts in 2021, a 27% increase since 2019. Insurance claims for catalytic converter theft — which is defined as theft of a part of a motor vehicle — increased by a staggering 1,215% from 2019 to 2021.

Analysts like Rosenberg stressed that "recent increases in property crime and carjacking require immediate action from law enforcement and policymakers."

Homicides declined 4% in 2022, but remain historically high

Homicides in major American cities ticked down by 4% in 2022, a decrease of 242 incidents across the 27 American cities publishing data for this crime. But the murder rate remained 34% higher than it was in 2019, before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the overall murder rate sank nationwide, the murder rate in Raleigh, North Carolina, surged 48%, while Seattle saw a 14% increase and Atlanta a 10% increase.

The city of Raleigh went from 33 homicides in 2021 to 49 in 2022, a statistical change Rosenberg calls "meaningful."

The number of homicides rose by 37% in the cities studied by CCJ between 2019 and 2020.

Rosenfeld said that declining confidence in law enforcement following widespread protests in the summer of 2020 meant some Americans were "less likely to cooperate with the police when they are trying to investigate serious crimes, less likely to report crimes to the police, and more likely to take matters into their own hands."

In 2022, the drop in homicides, aggravated assaults and gun assaults "could reflect some easing of the stress and dislocations associated with the pandemic, as well as decreases in the widespread social unrest that followed George Floyd's murder," according to the report. "Overall, however, the rates of these offenses remain substantially higher than prior to the pandemic. Fatal and nonfatal assaults continue to warrant serious attention from policymakers."

In Richmond, homicide rates plummeted 40%, while New York City experienced a more modest drop of nearly 12% in the citywide homicide rate.

Domestic violence incidents dropped slightly in a dozen major cities

Incidents of domestic violence decreased by nearly 5% in 2022, with 4,067 fewer domestic violence incidents reported.

Yet according to CCJ: "These results should be viewed with caution, however, because they are based on only 11 cities for which domestic violence data were available," underscoring the scarcity of reporting on such incidents.

A previous [systematic review](#) of domestic violence by CCJ documented an 8.1% increase in incidents after cities and states imposed pandemic-related lockdown orders in the spring of 2020. Authors noted that "COVID-19 left parents and children confined to their homes, cut off from friends, neighbors, colleagues, and others capable of reporting signs of abuse and violence and intervening to help potential victims escape violent situations."

These and other dynamics may result in a variety of reporting challenges, experts warn.

"At least earlier during the pandemic when victims were likely to be sequestered in their homes with offenders, they may not have been able to contact the police," Rosenfeld said. "But based on the police data, we see a continuing decline in domestic violence."

Robberies increase, particularly in non-residential areas

Robberies and larcenies — thefts unaccompanied by force or breaking and entering — increased in 2022 by 5.5% and 8% nationwide, respectively, across 31 major cities, the report found.

While residential burglaries dropped by 2%, nonresidential burglaries shot up by 26,960 — an 11% increase and a statistical phenomenon experts believe may be connected to the reopening of businesses. "The average monthly robbery rate in the 31 cities with available data was lower during the first two years of the pandemic than during the preceding two years," according to the report.

Robberies began to increase toward the latter half of 2021. By December 2022, there were 4,143 more robberies in the cities studied by CCJ, a 5.5% increase from 2021. Still, the number of robberies in 2022 remained 4% lower than pre-pandemic levels in 2019. By the same measure, nonresidential burglaries remained nearly 8% lower in 2022.

What it all means: Social unrest, COVID-19 and what's to come

A "return to somewhat normal living conditions," is one possible explanation for the recent uptick in crimes committed to acquire money or property from a victim, according to the CCJ.

"Opportunities for retail theft have increased as shops have reopened," the report noted. "More people on the street provides more targets for street robbers."

Another factor is the emergence of "destabilizing economic conditions," including inflation-driven price hikes in food, fuel, and housing prices that first materialized in the final months of 2021, and accelerated sharply during 2022.

As for homicides and other violent crimes outside of robbery, "I don't have a crystal ball," Rosenfeld conceded. "But I would say the overall decline, though modest, the downward trend we're seeing in 2022, suggests to me that we're going to continue to see declines in the coming year."

What exactly is to come in 2023? Experts like Rosenfeld acknowledge that history — and 2020 in particular — prove trendlines are highly susceptible to national phenomena.

"Barring another controversial incident akin to George Floyd — police use force that goes viral and spurs unrest — and barring a huge uptick in COVID that brings back lock downs, I would expect these trends to continue downward relatively modestly. That's my best guess about 2023. But it's a guess."

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| HEADLINE | 01/26 Secret Service mass attackers report |
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| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/01/26/mass-attack-report-secret-service-workplace-violence/ |
| GIST | <p>Half of mass attackers in the United States were retaliating for personal, domestic or workplace-related grievances, and many used firearms that were obtained legally, according to a Secret Service report published days after a man in California shot and killed at least seven people in what authorities believe could have been an act of "workplace violence."</p> <p>The report, released by the Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center on Wednesday, examined 173 targeted attacks carried out by 180 perpetrators between 2016 and 2020 in public or semipublic locations. It defines a mass attack as an act of violence in which three or more people, excluding the perpetrator, were killed or injured.</p> <p>The researchers found that three-quarters of the perpetrators had displayed behaviors or communicated in a way that concerned others before the attack. About 29 percent of attackers were described either by</p> |

themselves or others as “withdrawn, loners or anti-social,” the report said, and more than half had experienced mental health symptoms before the attack.

Ron Avi Astor, a professor at the University of California at Los Angeles, who studies school violence, said suicidal ideation is among the most important mental health-related factors he considers when examining mass attackers in general, and mass shooters in particular.

“We often frame it as a depression and other kinds of mental health issues when it should really be about suicidal ideation,” said Astor, who was not involved with the report. “A good number of them are suicidal, a good number of them are trying to create terror, and ... some of them might want to be remembered when they’re gone.”

About 93 percent of the attackers studied experienced at least one significant life stressor within five years of the incident, according to the findings. Most of them — 77 percent — experienced the stressors, which ranged from demotion at work to homelessness and divorce, within a year.

96 percent of the perpetrators studied in the report were assigned male at birth, and 47 percent were White, non-Hispanic individuals. One-third of the perpetrators were Black, and the average age for the attackers was 34.

The United States has an [epidemic of gun violence](#), and the report found that 73 percent of attacks involved the use of one or more firearms. Illegally obtained firearms were present in nearly one-quarter of attacks involving firearms.

Lori Ann Post, who studies mass killings as a public health issue at Northwestern University, said mass shooters ages 26 and older tend to be acting in retaliation for a perceived loss or failure. “The older ones seem to have left home, they’ve separated from their parents, but then they self-implode and destroy their life,” she said. “They want revenge, they’re disgruntled, they want payback.”

She said the report should have more narrowly defined mass attacks as incidents in which a perpetrator killed four or more people, because such attackers tend to be more organized and thoughtful in their planning. (The Gun Violence Archive defines mass shootings as incidents in which four or more people, excluding the shooter, are killed or injured. Washington Post reporters are usually dispatched to [cover an incident when there are at least four deaths](#).)

“Using the threshold of 3 or more injured is going to generate so many more cases, and it doesn’t tell us what the problem is,” said Post, who was not affiliated with the report.

Meanwhile, about 26 percent of the attackers expressed beliefs that involved conspiracy theories or hateful ideologies.

“Bias-based beliefs included antisemitism, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ, anti-Asian, misogyny, and race-based supremacy,” the authors wrote, adding that some perpetrators also subscribed to anti-government and extreme Islamist ideologies.

The database that Post uses for her research has recorded at least six mass shootings in the United States, with 39 people killed and 11 injured so far this year. The Gun Violence Archive puts the number of mass shootings at 39 or more.

“No matter who you are, what data you use, there is an escalation going on,” she said.

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Click on link to download PDF report: Mass Attacks in Public Spaces 2016-2020
<https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-01/usss-ntac-maps-2016-2020.pdf>

HEADLINE 01/25 Colombia drug kingpin pleads guilty

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| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/colombian-drug-kingpin-pleads-guilty-to-smuggling-cocaine-into-u-s-11674682175?mod=hp_listb_pos2 |
| GIST | <p>A Colombian drug kingpin who was once one of the country's most wanted fugitives pleaded guilty Wednesday in a Brooklyn federal court to overseeing the smuggling of more than 100 tons of cocaine into Central America and the U.S.</p> <p>Dairo Antonio Úsuga David was extradited to the U.S. last year after the Justice Department accused him of being the former leader of the Gulf Clan, one of the largest and most powerful cocaine-trafficking organizations in Colombia. Mr. Úsuga David, who is also known by the alias Otoniel, was arrested in Colombia in 2021 after years on the run. The U.S. had placed a \$5 million bounty on his capture.</p> <p>Mr. Úsuga David, 51 years old, pleaded guilty to running a criminal enterprise and two other drug-related charges, telling a federal judge through a Spanish interpreter that he "obtained substantial income and resources from the narcotics-trafficking operation." The plea agreement settled three federal indictments that Mr. Úsuga David faced.</p> <p>Federal prosecutors in the Brooklyn U.S. attorney's office said in court that federal sentencing guidelines would likely recommend Mr. Úsuga David receive a term of life in prison. However, as part of his extradition, the U.S. agreed it wouldn't seek a life sentence, prosecutors said. The judge hasn't set a sentencing date.</p> <p>As part of his plea deal, Mr. Úsuga David agreed to not oppose the Justice Department seeking a \$216 million forfeiture judgment against him. He also faces tens of millions of dollars in fines.</p> <p>"With today's guilty plea, the bloody reign of the most violent and significant Colombian narcotics trafficker since Pablo Escobar is over," Brooklyn U.S. Attorney Breon Peace said in a statement after the plea hearing.</p> <p>Mr. Úsuga David said in court that until his capture, for more than a decade, he headed the Gulf Clan, a rural militia of at least 1,000 fighters that operates across several Colombian provinces. The group would tax each kilogram of cocaine that went through the region it controlled, he said. It also oversaw shipments of the drug through Central America and ultimately to the U.S., he said.</p> <p>Prosecutors said the Gulf Clan also employed sicarios, or hit men, to carry out kidnappings and assassinations. Mr. Úsuga David acknowledged in court that his group oversaw killings.</p> <p>Paul Nalven, a lawyer for Mr. Úsuga David, said that while his client was remorseful for his actions, he had been forced to join a paramilitary group at 16 and was involved in the internal fighting in Colombia for most of his life.</p> <p>"Our client is really a child of the years of violence in Colombia," said Mr. Nalven, who added that Mr. Úsuga David "is not making an excuse for his criminal conduct."</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Calif. mass shootings: 25 dead, 8 days |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/25/california-mass-shootings-reaction-communities |
| GIST | <p>All the names of the dead from one California mass shooting had not yet been released when the news alerts started again on Monday afternoon: there had been another shooting. There was another gunman at large. Seven more people were dead.</p> <p>Gun violence takes a daily toll in California, but the brutality, scale and pace of the past week has felt different. In the course of just eight days, at least 25 people were killed in four separate mass shootings, defined as any shooting in which at least four people are injured.</p> |

The killings – which cut across a big city, a placid Los Angeles suburb, and two small farming towns – have left residents shaken, exhausted and afraid, and renewed calls for some kind of fundamental change.

“This proliferation of violence just seems like it’s perpetual,” said Tinisch Hollins, the executive director of Californians for Safety and Justice, an [advocacy](#) group for survivors of violence. “It’s so common now to hear of mass shootings that they don’t even stay in the headlines. Not even a day later, we’re talking about an entirely different incident. It’s horrifying.”

An average of five California residents die from gun homicides each day, but mass-casualty shootings highlight how violence can upend any community in the state, from rural enclaves to quiet suburbs.

“At some point, you get tired of ‘thoughts and prayers’. You get tired of writing statements,” said Fernando Rejón, executive director of Urban Peace Institute, a community safety organization founded in California. “And you keep asking yourself, what is going to be the tipping point? After [Uvalde](#) and all these recent mass shootings, you think they’ll be the tipping point, and then it’s not.”

A Saturday night shooting in Monterey Park, California, America’s first “suburban Chinatown”, targeted a ballroom dance studio popular with elderly Asian American patrons on the eve of the Lunar New Year. Police said they were still trying to understand why the shooter, a 72-year-old Asian American man, had murdered 11 people, and injured nine more, at a studio he had apparently frequented for years.

On Monday afternoon, a 66-year-old Asian American man opened fire on current and former co-workers at two mushroom farms in Half Moon Bay, in northern California, officials said. Some of the killings reportedly took place in front of children who lived nearby, one official said: “For children to witness this is unspeakable,” [she said](#). One person was wounded, and seven people died.

Less than four hours after the Half Moon Bay shootings, early on Monday evening, a group of people in Oakland were reportedly filming a music video when [shooting broke out](#) near a gas station. An 18-year-old was killed, and four other people were shot, ranging in age from 19 to 56, the East Bay Times reported. The perpetrators remained at large.

There appeared to be no limit to the age or vulnerability of the people at risk of being gunned down. Not even a week before the [Monterey Park shooting](#), a 10-month old infant had been shot to death at home in Goshen, a small town in central California, in a shooting that left six people, across five generations of one family, dead.

A 72-year-old woman had been shot in her sleep. Sixteen-year-old [Alissa Parraz and her son Nycholas](#) had been found together in a ditch outside their home, where it appeared they had been trying to flee the attack. All were shot in the head.

Samuel Pina, Elyssa’s grandfather, said [the family was in shock](#): “It comes in big waves.”

The gunmen in Oakland and Goshen were still unidentified and [at large](#).

Officials said the Half Moon Bay shooter drove himself to a local sheriff’s station following the slaying, where he was arrested in the parking lot. The 72-year-old who had opened fire at the California dance hall shooting had died by suicide after being pulled over by police the morning after the shooting.

But even in communities where the killers had been identified, and no longer posed a danger, there were still more questions than answers about the sudden violence, and what might have prevented it.

“In the end, there are simply too many guns in this country. And there has to be a change,” Dave Pine, a local lawmaker in San Mateo county, [said](#) on Monday, in the wake of the mushroom farm shootings.

Gun laws

California, the most populous US state and one of the world's biggest economies, also has the country's [strictest gun laws](#). In 1989, it became the first state in the nation to ban military-style assault weapons.

The state's per-capita gun homicide rate is lower than the US average, and sharply lower than many Republican-majority states, like Louisiana and Mississippi, which have much more permissive gun ownership laws.

But even California's Democratic supermajority, which has continued to pass a wide range of new gun regulations, can only do so much in a country where gun rights are fiercely protected. Gunmakers have produced new, military-style weapons that comply with the letter of the law on California's assault-weapon bans, while functioning in very similar ways to the original weapons. More conservative states with more permissive gun and ammunition purchasing laws, like Arizona and Nevada, are only a short drive away. Police departments in the state have been confiscating [an increasing number of "ghost guns"](#), home-built weapons without serial numbers.

At the federal level, gun rights absolutists continue to gain political power in the courts.

A single George W Bush-appointed federal judge in California, Roger Benitez, has become famous for striking down California gun control laws.

The US supreme court's new pro-gun majority, fought for by the National Rifle Association and secured by Donald Trump, has already expanded the legal scope of the second amendment, which they defined last year as [protecting the right of citizens to carry guns in public for self-protection](#). California is now being forced to [rework its gun control statutes](#) to comply with the new constitutional standards.

While some Californians continue to call for even tighter gun laws, moments of crisis, including high-profile shootings, also fuel gun sales. Firearm purchases surged in California during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, with an estimated [5 million Americans nationwide](#) becoming first-time gun owners in 2020 and 2021.

Amid an increase in anti-Asian hate crimes, there has been [a striking increase in the number of Asian Americans buying guns](#) to protect themselves.

Community anti-violence programs exist across the state, many of them focused on identifying and working with potential perpetrators of gun violence. But these local programs are often understaffed and overstretched.

"We have solutions that we know work. But they're not funded," said Dr Joseph Griffin, executive director of Youth Alive! in Oakland, which assists survivors of violence.

'We need to come together'

The onslaught of back-to-back tragedies has a cumulative impact on California residents, creating a sense of fear and despair, especially for people who see themselves in the victims that were targeted, advocates said.

Hollins, a San Francisco native who lost two brothers to violence, said the news cycles can be particularly traumatizing for people who previously survived violence or have relatives who were killed in shootings, and noted that the [recent killings by police](#) in the state also compounded the stress. "Some of us develop a level of compassion fatigue doing this work. It's not a lack of compassion for the individuals who have been harmed, but there's only so much you can process and hold from all these experiences. And so folks sometimes dissociate, and it can lead to this feeling of hopelessness."

Still, Hollins said she hoped to see unity across communities and racial lines, and resources are provided for those affected to recover: "I don't want these conversations to further fuel a political debate about

which communities are more deserving or more responsible for the violence that we see happening. We obviously have a systemic and societal issue that crosses all communities and is affecting all of us.”

Some survivors faced more barriers in getting help than others, local lawmakers said.

The Half Moon Bay shooting victims were Chinese and Latino, officials there said. Half Moon Bay’s vice-mayor, Joaquin Jimenez, said that some of the farm workers who had been targeted were undocumented, which might make them more hesitant to seek mental health counseling or other services.

“There’s a lot of fear,” Jimenez [said](#). “For them to come forward to ask for help is going to be very difficult.”

Nicole Lee, executive director of Urban Peace Movement, a racial justice group in Oakland, said that after mass violence, the priority is often to expand police’s presence: “When people are scared, they want a quick fix ... But law enforcement can’t be at every block at all times, and in many instances they can’t stop these situations. So how do we make interventions that really keep us safe?”

Lee, who is Chinese American, said it was also stunning to learn that the suspects in two separate mass shootings were older Asian men. While it was too soon to draw conclusions about what led to the violence, she noted that many Asian Americans in older generations may be [grappling with unaddressed trauma](#), including from surviving war.

“I don’t think we are attending to the mental health needs of immigrant communities and Asian communities, especially when there are language differences and cultural differences,” she said. “Not all cultures feel comfortable talking about trauma and mental health. And particularly ... with elders, there are often pressures to not talk about these things.”

Lee hopes that will shift: “People need to be listened to, and really need space to come together and support one another.”

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 ‘Pillowcase Rapist’ convicted in cold case |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/25/us/pillowcase-rapist-robert-koehler-florida.html |
| GIST | <p>A man suspected of being the “Pillowcase Rapist” who sexually assaulted dozens of women in South Florida in the 1980s was convicted on Wednesday in one of the attacks, prosecutors said.</p> <p>The man, Robert Eugene Koehler, 63, of Palm Bay, Fla., was found guilty of one count each of sexual battery, kidnapping and burglary in connection with a 1983 cold case in which a 25-year-old woman was stabbed and raped in her home in Miami-Dade County.</p> <p>Mr. Koehler, a registered sex offender, was arrested in 2020 after officials linked him through DNA evidence to at least 25 sexual assaults in the 1980s in Miami-Dade County alone, including the 1983 attack, according to a prosecutor.</p> <p>He faces a maximum possible sentence of life in prison in that case, and faces charges in similar cases from the 1980s in neighboring Broward County.</p> <p>After the jury deliberated for about three hours and found him guilty, Mr. Koehler appeared stoic as Judge Daryl Trawick, of the 11th Judicial Circuit of Florida, read the verdict in a courtroom at the Richard E. Gerstein Justice Building, according to video from CBS Miami.</p> <p>“Today’s jury verdict finding Robert Koehler guilty of sexual battery, kidnapping and burglary, finally closes the book on a terror that gripped the women of South Florida for far, far too long,” the state attorney for Miami-Dade County, Katherine Fernandez Rundle, said in a statement.</p> |

Damaris Del Valle, a public defender who represented Mr. Koehler, did not immediately respond to a call seeking comment on Wednesday.

During the trial, Mr. Koehler defended himself by claiming that corrupt officers had threatened and framed him, and forced him to commit crimes, [WPLG, a Miami television station, reported](#).

“I felt the cocking of the mechanism with the gun right here to my temple,” he [said](#) in court, referring to an officer who he claimed had placed a gun to his head and told him to not say a word about his actions.

The conviction came decades after a series of similar sexual assaults led the police to call the unknown attacker who was terrorizing South Florida the “Pillowcase Rapist.” He used a similar tactic during his crime spree: confronting women with a sharp object and raping them while he covered their faces or his own with a cloth.

At the time, 50 investigators [chased more than 1,000 leads](#), but there were no suspects for decades.

A key break in their investigation came in 2019, when Mr. Koehler’s son was arrested on a felony domestic violence charge, requiring him to submit a DNA sample to a criminal database. That sample gave investigators a close familial match with samples collected from the “Pillowcase Rapist” cases in the 1980s. Investigators matched the results with DNA collected from a shopping cart and door handle when they followed Mr. Koehler into a grocery store.

When investigators searched Mr. Koehler’s home, they discovered a dungeon in progress that he had been digging, the authorities said. They also found women’s jewelry and a metal nail file wrapped in a protective covering — items that investigators believed Mr. Koehler kept as souvenirs from his crimes.

Those discoveries renewed hope for prosecutors and victims who had long sought to place the perpetrator in prison. For years, the news media in South Florida had tenaciously covered the crimes and investigations. The sexual assaults and attacks had long haunted communities in Miami-Dade and surrounding counties, where frustration had mounted over the lack of an arrest.

Mr. Koehler faces charges in six cases in Broward County, said Paula McMahon, a spokeswoman for the Broward State Attorney’s Office. She said prosecutors would request that he be transferred to their jurisdiction after proceedings in Miami-Dade County are complete.

One victim in Broward County reported that she was woken up while she was in her bed just after midnight on June 23, 1984, according to court documents. “She explained that he jumped on her back, put a knife to her neck and stated ‘If you see my face, it’s all over,’” court documents said.

In another Broward County case, court documents state that Mr. Koehler moved a victim from her bed, where she had been sleeping beside her 5-year-old daughter, and attacked and sexually assaulted her.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Crime spree went Milton to Renton, Kent |
| SOURCE | https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/tuesday-crime-sprees-from-milton-renton-kent/281-ca94b96f-7311-4b3c-a050-d98cbacf1323 |
| GIST | <p>RENTON, Wash. — Milton Mayor Shanna Sherrell still can’t believe what she saw on Tuesday night while coming out of the Safeway on 900 Meridian Avenue East: a woman getting her car stolen, right in the parking lot.</p> <p>“I approached her with some caution, because I don’t know what’s going on, and she’s pointing to her car that is being stolen,” she recalled. “Prior to that, she informed me that they threw her to the ground, they stomped her head, and they hit her with the gun.”</p> |

Little did Mayor Sherrell know that that carjacking was the beginning of a crime spree that would stretch toward Renton and Kent.

According to investigators, the stolen vehicle was spotted at 11 p.m. being used in an armed robbery at a Renton 7-11, and a short time later in Kent at another 7-11 armed robbery.

Milton Police Chief Tony Hernandez says the car the criminals stole was actually the second attempt they made that night. They tried to take someone else's vehicle, but they were unsuccessful. They then assaulted an 18-year-old woman nearby. They hit her with a gun and took her vehicle to begin their crime spree.

Chief Hernandez says multiple individuals and vehicles were involved in this spree and the stolen vehicle was eventually spotted in Federal Way.

When officers tried to stop the vehicle, four males got out and ran away, escaping custody.

Chief Hernandez says this kind of brazen criminality is only becoming more common.

"We're starting to become numb to it because it's happening so frequently," he said. "This is something that a small city, we haven't seen anything like this. I've been here for nine years, and I haven't seen anything like it."

Mayor Sherrell has also seen crime in Milton rise over the past few years.

"We've just seen this steady increase and it's getting more brazen," she said. "It started with mailboxes being broken into, I recently had a package stolen off my porch, but to see a young lady get attacked in the parking lot, going to the grocery store, it's gone too far."

Hernandez says that most the crime seen in Milton doesn't come from residents, but criminals passing through the city.

He also expressed frustration at state laws that he says keep officers from being effective in catching them.

"We can't be as proactive as we'd like to be because the pursuit rules have changed," he stated. "It's emboldened our criminals so that they know that if an officer gets behind them, the only thing they have to do is take off and we can't chase them."

Sherrell says she hopes that something will be done soon, because she feels how to rising crime has transformed her city.

"I no longer keep things in the driveway, I have six cameras on my home. I carry pepper spray, I'm thinking about learning how to shoot a gun. It's changing us," Sherrell said.

So far, Milton Police haven't been able to identify any suspects, but encouraging anyone with any information to contact the Milton Police Department as soon as possible.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Central America gangs in southern Mexico |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/central-american-gangs-raising-fears-in-southern-mexico/ |
| GIST | <p>TAPACHULA, Mexico (AP) — With threatening phone calls, burned minibuses and at least three drivers shot to death, street gangs more closely associated with Central America are imposing their brand of terror-based extortion on public transportation drivers in southern Mexico.</p> <p>Organized crime groups including the rival Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 gangs have long maintained a presence along the border between Mexico and Guatemala, but Mexican authorities say their numbers</p> |

have increased over the past year as El Salvador cracks down on gang members and their criminal enterprises.

Drivers of the passenger vans and taxis people depend on for transportation in largely rural Chiapas say they live in fear for their livelihood, or their lives. They have raised the alarm, holding temporary work stoppages to get authorities' attention. The owner of one transport company in Tapachula has started moving with bodyguards.

Some admit to paying the extortion, having seen what happens to those who didn't.

"If we don't do anything we're going to be a little (El) Salvador," said a leader of drivers in the town of Huixtla, where a driver was shot by two men on a motorcycle last February. The man requested anonymity, fearing gang reprisals.

Drivers in Huixtla showed The Associated Press vouchers dating back a year, documenting the payments.

Generally, it starts with someone climbing aboard the bus and handing a phone to the driver, sometimes while pointing a gun at the driver's head. The drivers are told to give the phone to the owner of the bus, van or taxi, establishing a direct line of communication.

Then the threats begin.

Callers show the owners that they know who they are, where they live, their routines and their livelihoods, according to recordings reviewed by the AP. Speaking with distinctive Central American accents, Salvadoran slang and vulgarity, they ask for \$50 initially and then \$50 per month for each van or taxi, said a representative of drivers in Tapachula, who also requested anonymity out of fear.

The latest attack came Monday, when an unidentified man fired into the local bus terminal in Cacahoatan. No one was injured, but bullets struck a parked van and led drivers to suspend service. The shooter fled with another man on a motorcycle. Earlier this month, a van was set on fire in the same municipality.

Local authorities formed an anti-gang task force and posted police at transport hubs, and last month Mexico's military deployed an additional 350 soldiers to communities along the Guatemalan border.

"The intent is to support the civilian population to decrease the homicides tied to organized crime and the level of violence that has been on the rise in recent days," said Ángel Banda Lozoya, commander of the local army regiment.

But the drivers remain exposed as they make frequent stops on long rural routes, and military might can't easily quash a threat that arrives unseen, through menacing calls and messages.

José Mateo Martínez, Chiapas state prosecutor for migrant affairs, says El Salvador's crackdown on organized crime is behind the increase in criminal activity in Mexico. "People are coming to hide from that, but there are also gang leaders who come to create a criminal group here," he said.

In March 2022, El Salvador suspended some constitutional rights in reaction to an explosion of violence. The state of exception has continued since then, despite wide criticism by human rights organizations, with more than 60,000 people arrested on suspicion of gang ties.

Enforcement has been less forceful among El Salvador's neighbors: From 2018 through November 2022, Mexico arrested and deported 97 Salvadorans allegedly tied to gangs, mostly in the last two years, according to the Chiapas state prosecutor's office. Neighboring Guatemala deported 90 alleged Salvadoran gang members last year, National Civilian Police spokesman Edwin Monroy said.

The gangs are transnational by nature, with tens of thousands of members in the United States as well as Central America and Mexico. El Salvador's dominant street gangs formed in Los Angeles among

communities of immigrants who had fled armed conflicts in the 1980s. Eventually deported, they found fertile ground for more violence, committing crimes in one country and then hiding out in another, blending in with the daily flow of migrants across borders.

These gangs have long operated along Mexico's borders, sometimes providing street muscle for Mexico's powerful drug cartels or running their own criminal enterprises, profiting from the illicit traffic of drugs, guns and migrants. And some Mexican cartels extort businesses in other parts of the country.

But another Tapachula transportation leader, who requested anonymity because he feared reprisals insisted that these extortionists are Central American gangsters, not Mexican cartel members.

Extorting local transportation has been a key line of their revenue in El Salvador. Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele said in August that extortion of that sector had fallen dramatically. His transportation minister estimated bus companies had stopped paying some \$50 million to gangs.

Other authorities have announced some successes: In August, Mexican police took down a gang cell that sold drugs and robbed clients at a bar in Tapachula. One of the five people captured had a pending arrest order from El Salvador and was deported.

In November, Mexican authorities arrested and deported to El Salvador a purported leader of the Barrio 18 gang, suspected in the killings of six people in San Salvador in 2020. Authorities in El Salvador said he had fled to Mexico with his family and other gang members to avoid capture under El Salvador's special emergency powers.

And on Jan. 3, Guatemala captured and deported a Salvadoran gang member who had multiple arrest warrants on charges ranging from aggravated murder to terrorism.

But people who depend on transit in southern Mexico remain dissatisfied. There's a police vehicle parked daily at the local station in Tapachula where vans arrive and depart constantly, but their drivers remain exposed.

Two of the killings happened northwest of Tapachula near the Pacific coast. In September, a man got out of a van driving the route between Tonalá and Arriaga and shot the female driver. In late October, a driver was shot in Mapastepec by two men on a motorcycle, not far from the local terminal.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 German train knife attack; 2 dead, 7 injured |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/man-stabs-injures-passengers-german-train-96662214 |
| GIST | <p>BERLIN -- A knife-wielding man described as a stateless Palestinian has fatally stabbed two people and injured seven others on a train in northern Germany before being grabbed by passengers and arrested by police, officials said. The motive of Wednesday's attack was not immediately known.</p> <p>Germany's Federal Police force said the suspect used a knife to attack several passengers shortly before a regional train traveling from Kiel to Hamburg arrived at the Brokstedt station.</p> <p>Police spokesman Juergen Henningsen from the nearby city of Flensburg said two of the stabbed people died after the attack. Three were severely injured and four others suffered minor injuries. No details were given about the identity of the victims.</p> <p>The attacker was also injured and taken to the hospital, police said.</p> <p>German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser expressed shock about the brutal attack.</p> <p>"The knife attack in a regional train is shocking news. All our thoughts are with the victims of this terrible act and their families," she said.</p> |

“The background to the crime is now being investigated at full speed,” Faeser added. “I would like to sincerely thank the police and rescue workers who responded.”

Authorities said they were first alerted to the incident shortly before 3 p.m. when several passengers on the train made emergency calls to police. Police said the train was stopped and the attacker was detained outside the train after several passengers held him until officers arrived to detain him.

The interior minister of Schleswig-Holstein state, Sabine Suetterlin-Waack, condemned the attack.

“It is terrible,” Suetterlin-Waack told German public broadcaster NDR. “We are shocked and horrified that something like this has happened.”

She later told dpa that the attacker was a stateless 33-year-old Palestinian man.

Regional police and the federal police were on the scene and the prosecutor’s office was investigating the attack, NDR reported.

There were about 120 passengers on the train at the time of the attack, dpa reported. About 70 of them were questioned by police in a nearby restaurant after the incident. Several forensic teams were also on the scene, and investigators in white protective overalls worked near the tracks and the train station.

Others walked across the platform with cameras, next to which the regional train “RE70 Hamburg Hbf” in which the attack took place was stopped. A bakery located a few meters away from the station served hot drinks and baked goods to rescue workers and passengers, dpa reported.

The train station in Brokstedt was closed for several hours and train traffic was delayed across northern Germany.

Train operator Deutsche Bahn expressed its condolences on Wednesday evening saying that “our deepest sympathy goes to the relatives of the victims. We wish those injured a speedy and complete recovery.”

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 UN: Myanmar opium cultivation surges 33% |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/report-myanmar-opium-cultivation-surges-33-amid-violence-96680304 |
| GIST | <p>BANGKOK -- The production of opium in Myanmar has flourished since the military's seizure of power, with the cultivation of poppies up by a third in the past year as eradication efforts have dropped off and the faltering economy has led more people toward the drug trade, according to a United Nations report released Thursday.</p> <p>In 2022, in the first full growing season since the military wrested control of the country from the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021, Myanmar saw a 33% increase in cultivation area to 40,100 hectares (99,090 acres), according to the report by the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime.</p> <p>“Economic, security and governance disruptions that followed the military takeover of February 2021 have converged, and farmers in remote, often conflict-prone areas in northern Shan and border states have had little option but to move back to opium,” said the U.N. office's regional representative Jeremy Douglas.</p> <p>The overall value of the Myanmar opiate economy, based on U.N. estimates, ranges between \$660 million and \$2 billion, depending on how much was sold locally, and how much of the raw opium was processed into heroin or other drugs.</p> |

"Virtually all the heroin reported in East and Southeast Asia and Australia originates in Myanmar, and the country remains the second-largest opium and heroin producer in the world after Afghanistan," Douglas said. "There is no comparing the two at this point as Afghanistan still produces far more, but the expansion underway in Myanmar should not be dismissed and needs attention as it will likely continue — it is directly tied to the security and economic situation we see unfolding today."

The so-called Golden Triangle area, where the borders of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand meet, has historically been a major production area for opium and hosted many of the labs that converted it to heroin. Decades of political instability have made the frontier regions of Myanmar, also known as Burma, largely lawless, to be exploited by drug producers and traffickers.

Most of the opium exported by Myanmar goes to China and Vietnam, while heroin goes to many countries across the region, Douglas said.

"It is really where the value is for traffickers," he said. "Very high profits."

The cultivation of opium had been trending downward in recent years before the military took control of the government in 2021.

Production estimates hit a bottom of 400 metric tons (440 tons) in 2020. After rising slightly in 2021, that spiked in 2022 to an estimated 790 metric tons (870 tons), according to the report.

Since it took control of the government, the military's use of deadly force to hold on to power has escalated conflict with its civilian opponents to the point that some experts describe the country as now being in a state of civil war.

The costs have been high, with 2,810 people killed by government forces to date and 17,427 detained, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

The violence has meant that the government has been unable to reach some areas to carry out drug eradication raids, and has also had to divert its resources elsewhere. Consequently, eradication efforts appear to have decreased substantially, with 1,403 hectares (3,467 acres) reported eradicated in 2022 — some 70% fewer than in 2021.

At the same time, as the conflict continues to take its toll on Myanmar's economy, an increasing number of rural households have been pushed into relying more on opium cultivation for income, the U.N. said.

"The expansion of opium production that is underway is fundamentally about poverty and people in rural areas reacting to the economic situation," Douglas said. "It has always been there in tough times. At the same time, the security situation is clearly difficult with increasing frequency and intensity of conflict, and those involved in the drug economy have been left largely unchecked."

Its synthetic drug economy has also been surging for the same reasons, with reported regional seizures of methamphetamine and other drugs reaching record levels. In a single bust in September in Laos, for example, authorities seized 33 million methamphetamine tablets along with 500 kilograms (1,100 pounds) of crystal methamphetamine.

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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Experts: elderly mass shooters rare |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/monterey-park-half-moon-bay-mass-shooting-suspects/story?id=96635130 |
| GIST | <p>A 72-year-old man died by suicide after he allegedly killed 11 people in a mass shooting at a Monterey Park, California, dance studio on Saturday night. Two days later, a 67-year-old man was taken into custody for allegedly gunning down seven people in Half Moon Bay, California.</p> <p>It's rare to see mass shooters in their 60s or 70s, experts say.</p> |

Out of the 61 active shooter incidents in 2021, just six shooters were between 55 and 64 years old and only one shooter was 65 or older, [according to the FBI](#). Eighteen shooters were between 25 and 34 years old and 14 shooters were between 19 and 24 years old, according to the FBI.

"Isolation, anger, rage, revenge and feeling completely powerless. Whether you're 12 years old or 72 years old, that still is sort of the hallmark of what mass shooters are," former FBI agent and ABC News contributor Brad Garrett said.

But Garrett said this week's mass shootings tell "those of us who study this every day that you can't get too locked in because you're talking about human behavior." With "human behavior, there is no black and white -- there's a lot of gray," he said, based on ethnicity, religion, geography and more.

So who are these older shooters and why are they so rare?

In this week's shootings, the suspects were older Asian men who targeted Asian victims in their own communities, Garrett noted.

The motive is unknown for 72-year-old Huu Can Tran, the [Monterey Park suspect](#). He is accused of opening fire on Asian victims his own age at a dance hall where he'd spent time before.

Tran's former tenant and longtime acquaintance told ABC News that Tran spent his nights mainly alone but would offer women free lessons in the dance studio. The acquaintance, who did not want to be named, said Tran "just couldn't get along well with people."

For the [Half Moon Bay shooting suspect](#), 67-year-old Chunli Zhao, workplace violence was believed to be the motive, according to authorities. Zhao allegedly opened fire at two farms, including a farm where he worked. The victims were adults of Hispanic and Asian descent, authorities said.

Men are usually more violent when they're younger and it can take until their mid-to-late 20s for their brains to develop enough to have sufficient impulse control, Garrett said.

A young man "is really only thinking about revenge," he said. "He's not thinking about the effects of what he's going to do on other people."

For older suspects, baggage can be a factor, Garrett noted.

"The thing about being older is you've also collected more baggage, as we all do in life, because of relationships, because of job failures, because of marriage failures, whatever it might be. And that can really build up as you get older," Garrett said.

Mental health may also be a component for this week's shooting suspects, Garrett said.

According to Garrett, the only way to stop mass shootings is to know about them ahead of time. Sometimes police get information on school shootings or workplace shootings before they happen.

"Firearms are just so readily available," Garrett said, noting that guns are purchased legally in most mass shootings.

Zhao, the Half Moon Bay suspect, was not known to police, authorities said. His semi-automatic handgun was legally purchased and owned, authorities said.

Tran, the Monterey Park suspect, had minimal criminal history. Authorities said he was arrested in 1990 for unlawful possession of a firearm, according to officials.

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| | <p>At Tran's home authorities said they recovered a .308 caliber rifle, homemade firearm suppressors and hundreds of rounds of ammunition in containers. Tran had a semi-automatic assault weapon with him Saturday night when he entered a second dance hall and was disarmed by a good Samaritan.</p> <p>Investigators also recovered a handgun in the van where Tran died by suicide.</p> <p>Zhao made his first court appearance on Wednesday. He has not yet entered a plea.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 DOJ: 27% La. inmates past release dates |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/27-inmates-louisiana-custody-held-past-release-dates/story?id=96671162 |
| GIST | <p>Nearly 27% of all inmates held in the custody of the Louisiana Department of Corrections were held past their release dates over a four-month period, according to a Justice Department report.</p> <p>The Justice Department said in a report that between January and April 2022, 26.8% of the people, or 1,108 people, released from LDOC's custody were held past their release dates. 24% of the people were held for over 90 days past their release dates, and the median number of days over detained was 29, the report added. There were nearly 4,200 people in custody overall.</p> <p>"LDOC is deliberately indifferent to the systemic over detention of people in its custody," the Justice Department said.</p> <p>The agency's over detention violates the 14th amendment which guarantees people that are incarcerated in jail and prison not to be detained beyond their release dates, the Justice Department said.</p> <p>"Our investigation uncovered evidence of systemic violations by the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections that have resulted in the routine confinement of people far beyond the dates when they are legally entitled to be released. We are committed to taking action that will ensure that the civil rights of people held in Louisiana's jails and prisons are protected. We stand ready to work with state officials to institute long overdue reforms," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke, of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, in a press release on Wednesday.</p> <p>This is costly, the Justice Department said.</p> <p>"In just this four-month period, LDOC had to pay parish jails an estimated \$850,000, at a minimum, in fees for the days those individuals were incarcerated beyond their lawful sentences. At that rate, this unconstitutional practice costs Louisiana over \$2.5 million a year," a release from the Justice Department says.</p> <p>The DOJ said that LDOC has been on notice of the problem for 10 years but has done nothing to fix it.</p> <p>LDOC has not responded to ABC News' request for comment.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Feds bust fraud nursing diploma scheme |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/feds-announce-massive-takedown-fraudulent-nursing-diploma-scheme/story?id=96619487 |
| GIST | <p>A massive, coordinated scheme to sell false and fraudulent nursing degree credentials has been brought down by a joint federal law enforcement operation, Justice Department officials said Wednesday.</p> <p>As first reported by ABC News, officials said the scheme involved peddling more than \$100 million worth of bogus nursing diplomas and transcripts over the course of several years -- fake credentials that were sold to help "thousands of people" take "shortcuts" toward becoming licensed, practicing nurses.</p> |

Officials said the forged diplomas and transcripts were sold from what had been accredited schools to aspiring nurses, in order to help candidates bypass the qualifying requirements necessary to sit for the national nursing board exam. Although they still had to take the exam, the bogus credentials allowed them to skip vital steps of the competency and licensure process, officials said -- and once licensed, those individuals were able to find a job in the health care field.

Overall, the conspiracy involved the distribution of over 7,600 fake nursing diplomas and certificates issued by Florida-based nursing programs, according to officials.

"This is probably one of the most brazen schemes that I've seen. And it does shock the mind," Omar Perez Aybar, Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Office of Inspector General (HHS-OIG), told ABC News in an exclusive interview.

The sweeping enforcement action spanned five states: Florida, New York, New Jersey, Texas and Delaware, and resulted in more than two dozen criminal wire fraud and wire fraud conspiracy charges against 25 individuals.

We "expect our health care professionals to be who they claim they are. Specifically when we talk about a nurse's education, and credentials -- shortcut is not a word we want to use," said U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida Markenzy Lapointe. "When we take an injured son or daughter to a hospital emergency room, we don't expect -- really cannot imagine -- that the licensed practical nurse or registered nurse training our child took a shortcut."

HHS-OIG, the FBI and Justice Department worked jointly on the operation, dubbed "Operation Nightingale," in honor of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing.

Investigating agents spent weeks combing through upwards of 10,000 records from nursing schools to move the investigation forward. "As we started to poke through them we noticed there were no real courses the individuals took -- it was simply a cash mill," Aybar said.

Nursing candidates who allegedly participated in the scheme would pay as much as \$15,000 for the fraudulent diplomas, officials said.

The defendants include "owners, operators and employees" of the schools who "prepared and sold fake nursing school diplomas and transcripts to nursing candidates, knowing that the candidates would use those false documents to one, sit for nursing board examinations, secure nursing licenses, and three ultimately obtain nursing jobs in medical facilities -- not only in Florida, but elsewhere across the country," Lapointe said. All three schools have since closed, according to officials. Additional defendants charged include "recruiters" to bring in would-be buyers.

The alleged scheme enabled these nursing candidates allegedly buying the fake diplomas "to avoid hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of clinical training -- countless hours getting that experience," Lapointe said. "These people didn't go through that. That part was completely skipped."

"For them, it was worth the investment, or the risk," Aybar told ABC News.

For those involved -- "the owners of the nursing schools, certainly the recruiters and, without doubt, the recipients of the transcripts and the nursing diplomas" -- Aybar said, "It was definitely all motivated by greed."

Federal law enforcement officials underscored the high stakes of the scheme, saying that it potentially jeopardized patients' health and safety -- and that standards for safe nursing care cannot be purchased -- only learned.

"What is disturbing about the scheme is the possibility of harm coming to patients under the dubious care of one of these allegedly fraudulent nurses," acting Special Agent in Charge Chad Yarbrough, FBI Miami, said.

In the indictments, federal law enforcement officials alleged that the defendants -- some in leadership roles at nursing schools -- "solicited and recruited individuals who sought nursing credentials to gain employment as Registered Nurses (RN) or Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurses (LPN/VN)," then arranged with co-conspirators "to create and distribute false and fraudulent diplomas and transcripts" to falsely represent that the aspiring nurses had attended the program and had completed the necessary courses to receive a diploma, when "in fact, the aspiring nurses had never actually completed the necessary courses and clinicals."

Aybar said one of the ways officials were alerted to the alleged scheme was when the Florida state auditing process discovered poor passing rates at three nursing schools.

Alleged participants in the scheme backdated the diplomas and transcripts they were selling, to make them appear legitimate, authorities said. Applicants would use those forged diplomas, transcripts and additional records to obtain licensure in various states -- then, once licensed, applicants could then use those fraudulent documents to get nursing jobs "with unwitting health care providers throughout the country," according to officials.

Officials said they had "not learned of, nor uncovered any evidence of patient harm stemming from these individuals potentially providing services to patients" -- but it was the potential for that harm to patients that was precisely the concern.

Aybar said that is why, from the onset of the investigation, authorities have been working with state licensing boards to share as much information as they could, as fast as they could, so the respective boards "can assess what actions to take to prevent these individuals from rendering care."

The action by federal law enforcement comes at a crucial moment in the health care industry, where an existing nurse shortage, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has left many nursing staffs spread thin and burnt out.

"I'm confident that there will be a level of accountability that all of these individuals will face," Aybar said.

Defendants in the alleged scheme, if convicted, face a statutory maximum of 20 years in jail for the charges of wire fraud and wire fraud conspiracy, the DOJ said.

Aybar pointed to the pledge of ethics and principles that nurses take, called the "Nightingale Pledge."

"They pledge that they're going to abstain from any deleterious act. They will do all in their power to enhance and honor the profession. Clearly, these individuals did not do that here," he said.

"We understand that this conduct has no reflection on the hard work and dedication that [nurses] put into making this profession honorable, and so thank you for that," Aybar added. "I encourage those of you -- if you're in a setting and you happen to have someone that may not be practicing up to the standards as you understand it, maybe if you see something, say something."

Officials said that at this point it is up to the state licensing boards to push forward with action against those individuals under their purview -- some of whom have been practicing nursing "somewhere in the United States, perhaps currently," Lapointe said.

"We know who they are," Lapointe said.

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| | "Not only is this a public safety issue, but it also tarnishes the reputation of nurses who actually did the hard clinical and coursework required to get licenses and jobs," Lapointe said. "And of course, erodes the centuries-old trust we have built with our country's nurses." |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Ex-student jailed 8yrs: China govt. spy |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/student-gets-8-years-spying-chinese-government-96676755 |
| GIST | <p>CHICAGO -- A former Chicago graduate student was sentenced to eight years in prison Wednesday for spying for the Chinese government by gathering information on scientists and engineers in the U.S. with knowledge about aerospace and satellite technology.</p> <p>A federal jury in Chicago in September convicted Ji Chaoqun, 31, of conspiracy to act as an agent of China's Ministry of State Security without notifying the U.S. attorney general, acting as a spy in the U.S., and lying on a government form about his contacts with foreign agencies.</p> <p>The charges alleged that Ji was targeted by agents with the Ministry of State Security, or MSS, shortly before he came to the U.S. in 2013 to study engineering at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago.</p> <p>After traveling back to China for the winter break, prosecutors said, Ji was "wined and dined" by his MSS handlers. He was eventually given a top secret contract in which he swore an oath of allegiance to the agency's cause, agreeing to "devote the rest of my life to state security," according to prosecutors.</p> <p>Ji ultimately gathered background reports on eight U.S. citizens, all born in Taiwan or China, with careers in science and technology industries, including several who specialized in the aerospace field, prosecutors said. Seven worked for U.S. defense contractors.</p> <p>He sent the reports back to his handlers in a zipped attachment that was falsely labeled as sets of "midterm exam" questions, Assistant U.S. Attorney Barry Jonas said at Ji's trial.</p> <p>In 2016, a year after Ji graduated from the college, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserve through a program to recruit foreigners who have skills considered vital to the national interest.</p> <p>The jury found Ji guilty of giving false answers on a government background form that asked if he had ever had any contact with foreign intelligence agencies.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 01/25 Shot teacher lawyer: school was warned |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/school-board-decide-fate-superintendent-after-6-year/story?id=96654019 |
| GIST | <p>Abigail Zwerner, the teacher who was shot by a student in a classroom in Newport News, Virginia, earlier this month intends to file a lawsuit against the school board, her lawyer said Wednesday, alleging the shooting could have been prevented by school administrators.</p> <p>The announcement came the same day the school board voted to oust the district's superintendent, as parents and teachers called for accountability in the wake of the shooting.</p> <p>Zwerner sustained a gunshot wound to the chest when a 6-year-old student brought a gun into a classroom at Richneck Elementary School and intentionally shot and wounded her, according to police. A bullet remains lodged in her body, according to Diane Toscano, Zwerner's lawyer.</p> <p>"This should have never happened. It was preventable and thank God Abby is alive. But had the school administrators acted in the interest of their teachers and their students, Abby would not have sustained a gunshot wound to the chest," Toscano said at a press conference Wednesday.</p> |

Toscano revealed new details about the events leading up to the shooting, alleging that school administration was warned that the student had a gun with him at school and had threatened people several times the day of the shooting, but school administrators took no action.

Toscano alleged that the administration was warned four times by teachers and school employees about the student. There were three warnings from school employees about the gun and a warning from Zwerner about the student threatening to harm another child, Toscano alleged.

Zwerner's lawyer also revealed that another teacher went into the classroom after she was shot and restrained the shooter until police arrived.

Toscano laid out a timeline of events the day of the shooting:

At around 11:15 to 11:30 a.m., Zwerner went to a school administrator and told them that the 6-year-old had threatened to beat up another child that day. The administration did not take action or remove the student from the classroom, according to Toscano.

At 12:30 p.m. a teacher told a school administrator she searched the 6-year-old's backpack for a gun and told the administration that she believed the boy put the gun in his pocket before going outside for recess. The administrator downplayed the report and responded that the boy has little pockets, according to Toscano.

Shortly after 1 p.m., a third teacher told administrators that another student who was scared and crying confessed that the shooter showed him a gun at recess and threatened to shoot him if he told anyone, according to Toscano.

A fourth employee asked the administrator for permission to search the boy but was denied and was told to wait the situation out because the school day was almost over, according to Toscano.

Zwerner was shot almost an hour later, according to Toscano.

She is now home recovering, "but the road to recovery will be long," Toscano said.

"On behalf of the family of the child, we continue to pray for Ms. Zwerner and wish her a complete and full recovery. Our hearts go out to all involved," James Ellenson, an attorney for the family of the 6-year-old who allegedly shot Zwerner, said in a statement in response to Toscano's remarks.

A representative for Newport News Schools declined to comment on the allegations made by Zwerner's attorney noting that the school division's investigation into the incident is still ongoing, but said the school is under new leadership.

Karen Lynch, the extended learning supervisor, is now serving as the administrator at Richneck on special assignment and coordinating the students' return to instruction.

Richneck Elementary School will reopen to all students on Jan. 30.

The press conference came hours before the Newport News School Board held a special meeting to vote on a separation agreement with Newport News Public Schools Superintendent George Parker III.

The board voted 5-1 to relieve Parker as superintendent "without cause," effective Feb. 1.

"Parker is a capable division leader who has served Newport News for nearly five years through some extremely challenging circumstances," Lisa Surles-Law, the school board's chair, said following the vote. "This decision is based on the future trajectory and needs of our school division."

The board elected Michelle Mitchell to serve as interim superintendent in a 5-1 vote.

Parker and school administrators have been under fire from teachers, parents and community members since the shooting who say the administration has failed to address student behavior and ignored teacher concerns. The boy, who has not been named publicly, allegedly took a handgun from his home, put it in his backpack and brought it to school that day before shooting his teacher in an "intentional" act, according to the Newport News Police Department.

Police said Zwerner was teaching class that afternoon when the student pointed the gun at her and fired one round. The teacher took a defensive position, raising her hand. The bullet went through her hand and into her chest, police said.

There was no physical struggle or fight, according to police.

After Zwerner was shot, she ushered all of her students out of the classroom. She was the last person to leave the room, police said.

About 16 to 20 students were in the classroom at the time of the shooting and none of them were physically injured, according to police.

Police said responding officers found a school employee physically restraining the 6-year-old suspect in the classroom. The boy allegedly hit the school employee before officers took him into custody. He was subsequently taken to a local hospital for evaluation, police said.

Since then, a temporary detention order has been obtained and the child is currently receiving treatment at a medical facility, according to police.

Newport News Police Chief Steve Drew has called Zwerner a "hero" who "saved lives." He told reporters that the teacher has repeatedly asked how her students are doing.

Newport News police told ABC News that the investigation is ongoing and they do not know when it will be completed. When asked about the allegations made by Zwerner, they declined to comment due to the ongoing nature of the investigation.

The teachers union also did not comment on the announcement of a lawsuit.

"The Virginia Education Association continues to support our member, Abby Zwerner, in every way that we can during her physical and emotional recovery from the shooting at Richneck Elementary School. She was a true hero that day. Questions about the legal ramifications of this tragic event should be directed to her attorney," Kevin Rodgers, director of communications for the Virginia Education Association, told ABC News in a statement.

Zwerner was released from Riverside Regional Medical Center in Newport News last week and will continue to receive outpatient treatment, according to Riverside Health System.

Police said the investigation into the Jan. 6 incident, including a motive, is ongoing and no one has been charged so far. Richneck Elementary School has remained closed in the meantime.

The 9mm Taurus pistol used in the shooting was legally purchased by the boy's mother, according to police.

During a town hall meeting with parents earlier this month, Parker said the student's backpack was searched at school the morning of Jan. 6, after someone reported he may have had a weapon. The person who searched the backpack didn't find a weapon, according to the superintendent. It was unclear who conducted the search or how the tip about the weapon was received.

When asked for comment, a police spokesperson told ABC News: "We have determined through our investigation that a school employee was notified of a possible firearm at Richneck Elementary before the shooting occurred. The Newport News Police Department was not notified of this information prior to the incident. I cannot release any further information at this time because of the ongoing investigation."

Earlier this month, Newport News School Board Chair Lisa Surles-Law said they have been given approval to purchase 90 walk-through metal detectors, which will be installed in every school across the district, starting with Richneck Elementary School. The district will also bolster protocols on handling school violence, including implementing a safety stand down and reviewing student conduct and discipline records, according to Surles-Law.

The unnamed family of the boy released a statement last week, saying the "firearm our son accessed was secured" and that he "suffers from an acute disability and was under a care plan at the school that included his mother or father attending school with him and accompanying him to class every day."

"The week of the shooting was the first week when we were not in class with him. We will regret our absence on this day for the rest of our lives," the family said. "Since this incident, our son has been under hospital care and receiving the treatment he needs."

The boy's family called the shooting "horrific" and noted that they "have been cooperating with local and federal law enforcement to understand how this could have happened."

"Our heart goes out to our son's teacher and we pray for her healing in the aftermath of such an unimaginable tragedy as she selflessly served our son and the children in the school," they added. "She has worked diligently and compassionately to support our family as we sought the best education and learning environment for our son. We thank her for her courage, grace and sacrifice."

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